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Ritter Brown

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WHEN DREAMS COME TRUE

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SHE GLIDED AND WHIRLED IN THE MOONLIGHT, GRACEFUL AS A WIND-BLOWN ROSE. *PAGE 284.*

WHEN DREAMS COME TRUE

BY

RITTER BROWN
AUTHOR OF "MAN'S BIRTHRIGHT"

ILLUSTRATED BY

W. M. BERGER

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TO

MY SON

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ILLUSTRATIONS

"She glided and whirled in the moonlight, graceful as a wind-blown rose" . . . . . *Frontispiece*

FACING PAGE

"The picture which she presented was one he carried with him for many a day" 130

"Instinctively he raised the casket with both hands" 272

"'Madre! Madre *mia!*' she cried and flung herself into Chiquita's arms" 292

"They were startled by a low moan and saw Blanch sink slowly to the bench" 330

There is a tradition extant among the Indians of the Southwest, extending from Arizona to the Isthmus of Panama, to the effect that, Montezuma will one day return on the back of an eagle, wearing a golden crown, and rule the land once more; typifying the return of the Messiah and the rebirth and renewal of the race.

WHEN DREAMS COME TRUE

I

THE beauty of midsummer lay upon the land — the mountains and plains of Chihuahua. It was August, the month of melons and ripening corn. High aloft in the pale blue vault of heaven, a solitary eagle soared in ever widening circles in its flight toward the sun. Far out upon the plains the lone wolf skulked among the sage and cactus in search of the rabbit and antelope, or lay panting in the scanty shade of the yucca.

By most persons this little known land of the great Southwest is regarded as the one which God forgot. But to those who are familiar with its vast expanse of plain and horizon, its rugged sierras, its wild desolate *mesas* and solitary peaks of half-decayed mountains — its tawny stretches of desert marked with the occasional skeletons of animal and human remains — its golden wealth of sunshine and opalescent skies, and have felt the brooding death-like silence which seems to hold as in a spell all things living as well as dead, this land becomes one of mystery and enchantment — a mute witness of some unknown or forgotten past when the children of men were young, whose secrets it still withholds,

and with whose dust is mingled not only that of unnumbered and unknown generations of men, but that of Montezuma and the hardy daring *Conquistadores* of old Spain.

But whatever may be the general consensus of opinion concerning this land, such at least was the light in which it was viewed by Captain Forest, as he and his Indian attendant, José, drew rein on the rim of a broken, wind-swept *mesa* in the heart of the Chihuahuan desert, a full day's ride from Santa Fé whither they were bound, to witness the *Fiesta*, the Feast of the Corn, which was celebrated annually at this season.

The point where they halted commanded a sweeping view of the surrounding country. Just opposite, some five leagues distant, on the farther side of the valley which lay below them, towered the sharp ragged crest of the Mexican Sierras; their sides and foothills clothed in a thin growth of chaparral, pine and juniper and other low-growing bushes. Deep, rugged *arroyos*, the work of the rain and mountain torrents, cut and scarred the foothills which descended in precipitous slopes to the valley and plains below. Solitary giant cactus dotted the landscape, adding to the general desolation of the scene, relieved only by the glitter of the silvery sage, white poppy and yucca, and yellow and scarlet cactus bloom which glistened in the slanting rays of the afternoon sun and the intense radiation of heat in which was mirrored the distant mirage; transforming the desert into wonderful lakes of limpid waters that faded in turn on the ever receding horizon.

Below them numerous Indian encampments of some

half-wild hill tribe straggled along the banks of the almost dry stream which wound through the valley until lost in the thirsty sands of the desert beyond.

"'Tis the very spot, *Capitan* — the place of the skull!" ejaculated José, the first to break the silence. "See — yonder it lies just as we left it!" and he pointed toward the foot of the *mesa* where a spring trickled from the rock, a short distance from which lay a human skull bleached white by long exposure to the sun.

Instinctively the Captain's thoughts reverted to the incidents of the previous year when he lay in the desert sick unto death with fever and his horse, Starlight, had stood over his prostrate body and fought the wolves and vultures for a whole day and night until José returned with help from the Indian *pueblo*, La Guna. Involuntarily his hand slipped caressingly to the animal's neck, a chestnut with four white feet and a white mane and tail that swept the ground and a forelock that hung to his nostrils, concealing the star on his forehead; a magnificent animal, lithe and graceful as a lady's silken scarf, untiring and enduring as a Damascus blade. A horse that comes but once during twenty generations of Spanish-Arabian stock, and then is rare, and which, through some trick of nature or reversion, blossoms forth in all the beauty of an original type, taking upon himself the color and markings of some shy, wild-eyed dam, the pride of the Bedouin tribe and is known as the "Pearl of the Desert." The type of horse that bore Alexander and Jenghis Khan and the Prophet's War Chieftains to victory. As a colt he had es-

caped the *rodeo*. No mark of the branding-irons scarred his shoulder or thin transparent flanks. Again the Captain's thoughts traveled backward and he beheld a band of wild horses driven past him in review by a troup of Mexican *vaqueros*, and the beautiful chestnut stallion emerge from the cloud of dust on their rim and tossing his great white mane in the breeze, neigh loudly and defiantly as he swept by lithe and supple of limb.

"Bring me that horse!" he had cried.

"That horse? *José y Maria, Capitan!* He cannot be broken. Besides, it will take ten men to tie him."

"Then let ten men tie him!" he had replied, flinging a handful of golden eagles among them.

Many attempts had been made to steal the Arab since he had come into the Captain's possession. It was a dangerous undertaking, for the horse had the naïve habit of relegating man to his proper place, either by ignoring his presence, or by quietly kicking him into eternity with the same indifference that he would switch a fly with his tail. José might feed and groom and saddle him, but not mount him. To one only would he submit; to him to whom a common destiny had linked him — his master.

"*Sangre de Dios, Capitan!*" began José again, breaking in upon the latter's musings. "Is it not better that we rest yonder by the spring than sit here in this infernal sun, gazing at nothing? 'Tis hot as the breath of hell where the Padres tell us all heretics will go after death!" The grim expression of the Captain's face relaxed for a moment and he turned toward him with a laugh.

"Aye, who knows," he replied, "we too, may go there some day," and dismounting, he began to loosen his saddle girths.

"The gods forbid!" answered José, making the sign of the cross, as if to ward off the influence of some evil spell. "I do not understand you *Americanos*," he continued, also dismounting and untying a small pack at the back of his saddle. "You are strange — you are ever gay when you should be sober. You laugh at the gods and the saints and frown at the *corridos*, and yet toss alms to the most worthless beggar."

The foregoing conversation was carried on in Spanish. Although José had acquired a liberal smattering of English during his service with the Captain, he nevertheless detested it; obstinately adhering to Spanish which, though only his mother-tongue by adoption, was in his estimation at least a language for *Caballeros*.

The two men were superb specimens of their respective races. Their rugged appearance, height and breadth of shoulder would have attracted attention anywhere. The Captain wore a gray felt hat and a rough gray suit of tweed — his trousers tucked in his long riding boots. José was clad in the typical *vaquero's* costume — buff leggins and jacket of goat-skin, slashed and ornamented with silver threads and buttons, and a red worsted sash about his middle in which he carried a knife and pistol. From beneath the broad brim of his *sombrero* peeped the knot of the yellow silken kerchief which he wore bound about his head and under which lay coiled his long black hair.

Captain Forest was unusually tall and stalwart, deep chested and robust in appearance, with not a superfluous ounce of flesh on his body, hardened by the rigors of long months of camp-life. His head was large and shapely, well poised and carried high on a full neck that sprang from the great breadth of his shoulders. His face, smooth and sensitive, and large and regular in feature with high cheek-bones and slightly hollowed cheeks, was bronzed by long exposure to the sun and weather, adding to the ruggedness of his appearance. The high arching forehead, acquiline nose and firm set mouth and chin denoted alertness, action and decision, while from his eyes, large and dark and piercing, shone that strange light so characteristic of the dreamer and genius. And yet, in spite of this alertness of mind and body and general appearance of strength and power which his presence inspired, there lurked about him an air of repose indicative of confidence in self and the full knowledge of his powers. Sensitive to a degree, keen and alive at all times, the strength of his personality, suggestive of his mastery over men, impressed the most unobservant. Yet owing to his poise and self-control those about him did not realize wholly his power until such moments when justice was violated. Then the latent force within him asserted itself and he became as inexorable as a law of nature in his demands. An intense spirit of democracy oddly combined with fastidiousness made an unusual and attractive personality in which the mundane and the spiritual were strangely blended. Outwardly he was a man of the world, yet inwardly he had advanced so far into the

domain of sheer spirituality he scarcely realized that others groped their way among the most obvious material modes of expression.

Having removed their saddles and turned their horses loose to find what scant cropping the desert afforded, the two sought the shelter of the narrow strip of shade beside the spring at the foot of the *mesa*. Here they would rest until the heat of the day had passed, resuming their journey that evening. José unwound his *zerape* from his shoulders and spreading it on the ground between them, deposited two tin cups and a package of sandwiches upon it which, with the addition of a flask of *aguardiente* which the Captain drew from his pocket, formed their meal.

Two years previous the Captain had rescued his companion from a street mob in Hermosillo, the result of a feud that had broken out between her citizens and the Yaqui Indians; José having been mistaken for one of the latter. With his back against a wall and the blood streaming from his wounds, he was making a desperate stand. Three citizens who had run upon his knife, lay squirming at his feet; but the odds were too great. In another moment all would have been over with him had it not been for the Captain who chanced upon him in the nick of time. Snatching a club from one of his assailants and accompanying each blow with a volley of Spanish oaths, he rushed through the mob, scattering it in all directions. Whether it was the oaths or the Captain's exhibition of his fighting qualities that impressed José most it is difficult to say. Be that as it may, from that hour he belonged to Captain Forest body and soul.

He was the grand señor, the *Hidalgo*, in comparison to whom other men were as nothing.

The meal over, José with head and shoulders on one end of the *zerape*, stretched himself at full length upon the ground and, as was his wont, fell asleep almost immediately. Captain Forest swallowed a last draught of liquor. Then leisurely rolling a cigarette he lit it, and with back against the cliff and gaze fixed abstractedly on the mountains opposite, smoked in silence.

II

JACK FOREST'S life was rich and full to overflowing with the things of this world which are generally considered to make for happiness and culture. Into the measure of his life, the comparatively short span of thirty-five years, had been crowded a wealth of incident and experience that seldom falls to the lot of the most fortunate men in this commercialized era whose tendency is to pull nations like individuals down to a common level of mediocrity, and seems bent upon extinguishing even their few remaining national traits and characteristics.

Born in Washington and a graduate of Harvard, he had traveled to the four corners of the earth, and hunted big game from the arctic circle to the equator. During a winter's sojourn in Egypt he made the acquaintance of Lord X——, then Consul-General of Egypt, upon whose advice he entered the diplomatic service of his country. Five years were subsequently spent as first Secretary of the American legations in London and St. Petersburg. The enthusiasm with which he threw himself into the work and the natural executive ability which he displayed soon marked him as a coming man in diplomatic circles. But the speculations of his friends concerning his future career were destined to be rudely shattered by one of those inexplicable tricks of fate

which, in the twinkling of an eye, so often change the lives of individuals.

The spirit of adventure which had lain dormant within him ever since his decision to adopt diplomacy as a profession was suddenly awakened by the outbreak of hostilities between Spain and the United States. Through the influence of his father, General Forest, a Civil War veteran, and that of his uncle, Colonel Van Ashton, retired, he received the appointment of Second Lieutenant of Volunteers and shipped with his regiment for Cuba. He was wounded at the battle of Santiago, though not seriously. At the close of the campaign in the West Indies his regiment was ordered to the Philippines, where, at the end of a year, he was promoted to a captaincy in the regular army. At this juncture in his career the sudden death of his father necessitated his return to America on leave of absence.

The estate to which he and his mother fell heirs was an unusually large one, the administration of which demanded his immediate and entire attention if they wished to keep their holdings intact. But as this was clearly incompatible to the life of a soldier, he was forced to resign from the army. He took this step without great reluctance, for brief though his career as a soldier had been, it was a brilliant and satisfactory one. It was not for the glory of the profession that he had entered the army, but purely in the spirit of the patriot; and he had fought his battles and returned with newly won laurels and a fund of interesting experiences. Besides, campaigning in the Philippines had convinced him that diplomacy, though perhaps not always so exciting, was

preferable to a life whose daily routine was enlivened only by target practice, dress-parades and the occasional diversion of chasing naked men about in the bush.

As soon as the estate was settled it was his intention to reënter the diplomatic service for which he knew himself to be better fitted than before his two years experience in the army.

The bulk of the fortune consisted of mines in Mexico, whither he was called to superintend his interests. At the end of a year, however, he received word from his uncle informing him that the Ministry to Greece would be open to him if he chose to accept it. Jubilant over the prospect of reëntering the world of Diplomacy so soon, he immediately telegraphed his acceptance, and the following day addressed a letter to the girl he had known from his youth, Blanch Lennox, whose character, personal charm and ambition marked her as the one to share the future with him. There was as little doubt in his mind that she would accept him, as there was in hers that he would make the proposal; and when a week later, he received a telegram confirming his conjecture, the answer came as a matter of course.

The business at the mines was settled, but Mexico and her people were a new experience. Its vast expanse of plains, virgin forests and wild sierras lured him on; and in the company of a friend whose acquaintance he had made at the mines, he passed the remaining time left at his disposal traveling in the interior of the country, gathering data and visiting the wild tribes who, though of the same blood, were in characteristics a distinct people from the slavish *peon*

classes. A people that have never actually submitted to the rule of the White man, and have held tenaciously to the ancient beliefs and customs of their forefathers.

He was impressed by the fact that, although living entirely independent of the outside world, they were nevertheless self-supporting and in certain instances had developed marked degrees of civilization.

He saw how they tended their flocks and fields, made their own clothes and articles of use, and wrought gold and silver ornaments embellished with native stones, and used the bow and arrow in the chase. They knew nothing of modern civilization. Their daily lives were sufficient unto them, and they were therefore happy. God seemed infinite and dwelt in their midst, and spoke to them from the dust as well as from the stars. But why was this? Why was life for them, in the natural course of events, so easy and simple, and so difficult and complicated for the civilized man?

His thoughts continually traveled back to the Eskimo of the frozen North, and to Africa and her sun-parched deserts and star-strewn skies with the roaming Bedouin in the background who regarded the earth as a footstool to be used only as a means to an end and houses as habitations fit only for slaves.

The picture he saw was not the ideal one — the emancipated man of whom men of all times have dreamed and to whose advent some men are still looking forward. But the care-free life of the primitive man set him thinking — opened his eyes to certain truths which, until now, he had failed to observe. Longings for the unattainable began to stir within him and take hold of him

in a manner entirely new. Hazy, fragmentary glimpses of hitherto undreamed possibilities began to shape themselves in his mind. The immensity and profundity of the universe and the mysterious growth of its hidden life held and enthralled him.

The last word, he felt, had not yet been spoken. There was something lacking in the so-called civilized man's economy — a lack which his philosophy failed to account for, but which was not observable among animals and primitive men. There, the economy of the infinite cosmic mechanism which binds and holds all manifestations of life in one harmonious whole was too apparent to even suggest the detachment of a single form of life from this whole, but with the civilized man it was different. He alone seemed to have detached himself from this harmonious whole — his life stood out as a thing separate and apart from it. There seemed to be no permanent place for him in the economy of nature.

But how had this estrangement taken place? Why was he, the intellectually developed man, incapable of living in harmony with the universal law of life when it was so easy for the primitive man to do so? It was evident that he had lost his way somewhere along the path of normal development. Everything pointed to this — its signs were apparent to all who wished to see. Nature voiced it on every hand, in the forests and plains and on the mountain tops, and during the silence of night as he lay on the ground gazing at the stars overhead.

The wind that sighed among the ruined temples of

the ancient races and the mountains that looked down upon them seemed to speak to him in the ever recurring refrain: "Behold the works and glories of men — we are enduring! The same wind that sighs among them this day, sang to them when their walls and pillars stood erect. The same mountains that shadowed them in the past, will still stand guard over the valleys in the days to come when the works of the present and future generations of men have passed away forever!"

He knew that these questions had been asked during countless generations, and that men were still asking them to-day. He knew also that man's situation in the universe was taking on a new aspect, and yet it was strange that such thoughts should absorb him, a man of the world, of the fighting type, whose wide experience with men and things had hitherto convinced him that the world, though not perfect, was good — that present progress made for good, and the best western civilization had thus far attained was probably about all men of the future could look forward to so far as happiness was concerned. These views, however, were no longer tenable if our arts, philosophies and scientific attainments fail to civilize and refine us. Clearly, modern man's conception of ethical progress was as deficient in certain respects as that of the great historic civilizations. The secret of right living had not yet been discovered. History proved this, and unless the trend of modern materialistic tendencies was supplanted by something higher, the same fate that overtook the Ancients must inevitably overtake us.

But the date of their wedding had been set, and the time for their departure for Athens was drawing nearer. Santa Fé lay a day's ride from the railroad. Instead of performing the journey in a single ride, he decided to pass the night at the *hacienda* of a friend, Don Felix de Tovar, some twelve miles distant from the old Spanish town. Thither he would ride during the cool of the evening, completing the remainder of the journey the following day. Between Santa Fé and Don Felix's *hacienda* lay the Indian *pueblo*, La Jara, situated some distance off the main road. By following the trail that led past this village, José explained, they would reduce the distance to Don Felix's *rancho* by at least two or three miles.

The country through which they traveled was broken and rugged. Twilight had descended upon the land, and as the two, following the trail that skirted the foothills, rode to the crest of the *mesa* upon which the village was situated, they came suddenly upon a woman riding at full gallop. The soft, sandy formation of the soil was such that neither heard the approach of the other, and all three reined in their horses with a jerk; the woman throwing hers well back upon its haunches; a high-strung, black, wiry animal whose foam-flecked mouth and breast told that she had been riding hard.

How free and wild she looked! She was either a Spaniard or an Indian, and rode astride. A bunch of red berries adorned her heavy black hair which fell in masses about her shoulders, accentuating the curve of her throat and well-formed, clear-cut features just discernible in the waning light as she sat motionless and

erect on her horse, gazing at him in silence and evidently as much surprised as he was by their sudden encounter. Then with a smile and a nod of the head by way of acknowledgment, she lifted her reins and spurred past him; disappearing in the gathering darkness on the trail below them. Her unexpected appearance and grace and type of beauty, so different from that of the woman who occupied his thoughts, thrilled him for the moment as he listened to the soft, muffled hoof-beats of her horse which grew fainter and fainter until all was silence, save for the sighing of the wind among the *mesquit* and *manzanita* bushes that grew about them. All trace of her was gone. She had vanished into the night as swiftly as she had come.

Then a strange thing happened. Something suddenly gripped his heart; that indefinable something after which he had been groping and which had been knocking so persistently at the portals of his inmost being, but which until now had eluded him. The sight of that strange woman had shown him that, to be beautiful is to be free and natural. That the world he knew and revered was purely an artificial world of man's invention, transitory and a thing apart from the universal life in the midst of which he had been placed and apart from which it was impossible for him to develop naturally. That nature is more perfect than all the artificialities of civilization and a more efficient environment for the normal development of man. That man's happiness and true relationship to the universe were attainable only through direct contact and communion with this life whose creations are the only great and lasting realities.

Thus only was it possible for him to quicken and vitalize his powers to their fullest. That when creation finished its task, peace and harmony reigned in the midst of the terrestrial garden, rendering man's pursuit of happiness through diverse acts and infinite forms of diversion quite unnecessary.

He had discovered the wild man's secret — why the stars still sing to him as of yore — why the winds and the waters, the animals and the rocks and the trees still speak to him in harmonies long since forgotten by civilized man. A great and secret joy, such as he had never before experienced, filled his soul; uplifting, consuming and mastering him. . . . But what would Blanch Lennox say? She with whose inner life he felt in perfect accord? She who was his ideal, the inspiration of his eager youth and well-spring of his ambitions of later years? The woman who always met his problems with quick sympathy and comprehending interest? Could she understand him now, sympathize with his new views of life? He knew a battle royal would ensue between them, but felt confident of his power to convince her. He found, however, upon his return to Newport where she awaited him, that he had reckoned without his host. She attributed his enthusiasm and changed convictions to his ardent love of nature and the roving spirit that animated him, but could not be convinced that the world of society in which she moved and shone and for whose adulation she lived, was the lesser world. She refused to relinquish their present life so full of the things of this world, the only realities which she knew or recognized, for some vague uncertainty.

Surely the *wanderlust*, the love of the primitive, had gotten into his blood!

At first she laughed scornfully, then hysterically.

"Was he mad to suggest such folly — imagine that she could even dream of participating in such a life? He might give up the ambition of a lifetime, fling aside a brilliant career to follow the path of his mad fancy if he chose, but she would not be a partner to his folly!"

Again he noted her set lips and the pallor that succeeded the flush on her cheeks after her first furious outburst. Again he saw her as she rose, pale and trembling, her eyes blazing.

"And you dare come to me with this after all the years I have waited for you? Go back to your deserts — your wild woman and her land of savages!" she had cried in a voice of suppressed indignation and contempt. After all he could not blame her, knowing as he did the world in which she had been reared. She was right. And yet, as he sat there in the desert with his back to the cliff and smoked in silence, living over again the poignant memories of the past, the bitterness he experienced at the moment was even keener than on that memorable night when they had parted.

Could he ever forget her? The memory of that night clung to him in spite of every effort to banish it from his mind.

Above them shone the stars, golden as the apples of Hesperides. He heard again the rhythmic sound of the sea and the plashing of the fountain near at hand, and noted the rose petals which the breeze had shaken from the bushes to the path where they stood; filling the

soft night air with their fragrance, and she, with the white moonlight in her face and the pink rose in the golden wreath of her hair, fair as the woman of Eden.

The vision passed before him in kaleidoscopic review, warm and living and tempting and haunting, and then faded from his sight.

The shadows of evening began to lengthen. Close at hand a lizard that had been sunning itself all day against the cliff raised its head for an instant, then slipped noiselessly away with the shadows into a crevice in the rock. The Indian camp-fires flickered in the valley below, their slender, ghostlike columns of smoke, rising heavenward straight as the flight of a flock of cranes, floated away in a pale, blue white cloud on the evening. The soft, plaintive notes of the night-hawk and prairie-owl mingled with the prolonged cry of the wolf in the distant foothills. The night breeze sprang up, fanning the parched desert with its cool breath. The stars came forth and the silver rim of the moon emerged above the dark towering mass of the Sierra Madres, outlining their crests in broken silvery lines as its full white disk swept into view; flooding the valley and plains with strange ethereal light.

José's sleep seemed troubled. He moved uneasily and muttered incoherently.

Where was she now — what was she doing? The woman he still loved in spite of himself? And whither was he drifting — what was the real end in view? What subtle, irresistible influence was it that impelled him to take the step, sacrifice all that men prize and

hold dear? During such moments he questioned the seemingly blind destiny by which he felt himself impelled. A thousand miles he had ridden in search of the realization of his dreams, but had not found it. That which at first had lured him on, now seemed to mock him. The vision that beckoned to him still maintained a sphinx-like attitude toward his questioning.

Where was the new life he had promised himself? Was it only a vision he had conjured up in his mind? Either he had overlooked something in his calculations, or his logic was at fault.

Was this all? Had the human race attained its zenith — was there nothing beyond, nothing to look forward to, and he merely the latest dreamer and enthusiast who was pursuing the same will-o'-the-wisp that others had sought through the ages? If so, then what fatality was it that encompassed him and continually urged him on? Doubt counseled him to return, but pride and confidence in self still cried forward. Come what would, he either must go on to the end or accept the humiliation that awaits him who turns back. But why was the realization withheld from one so willing — from one who had dared face the world alone?

For the first time the loneliness and isolation of his life was borne in upon him as he reviewed the past, step by step, and thought of the woman he had chosen to share the future with him and whom it was impossible to disassociate from his plans.

Fortune seemed to have deserted him. A sudden revulsion and sickening sense of failure swept over him, crushing and overwhelming him. Would the voices

never break silence? Must he forever ride alone with the sun in his face? Save for a cricket that chirped dreamily in a cleft of the rock close at hand, and the distant, subdued sounds of voices and barking of dogs in the Indian camps below him, there was no response to his query.

Strange that he, Jack Forest, the possessor of twenty millions, the associate of the great people of this world, and who was never referred to by his family and friends as other than the Magnificent, the man who did things, should find himself in the heart of the Mexican deserts apparently as far from his goal as when he started. It was incredible, but true, nevertheless. For was he not there in the midst of the wilderness with the scent of the sage in his nostrils and the alkali dust on his boots?

He closed his eyes and let his head sink forward on his breast, wearied by the oft-repeated endeavor to solve that which was fast becoming a riddle, a chimera to him, and he probably would have fallen asleep had he not been startled suddenly into a consciousness of his surroundings by a low whinny; soft and plaintive as a child's voice. Looking up, he saw Starlight standing before him with ears erect and pointed forward, gazing inquiringly into his face.

Again the Chestnut whinnied, and lowering his head, caressed his shoulder affectionately with his nose. Then raising his head, he began to paw the ground impatiently, indicating as plainly as words that it was time to resume their journey.

The night wind sighed across the desert and there

was a chill in the air as the moon mounted higher in the heavens; an ideal night for travel. José awoke with a start and sitting bolt upright on the ground, gazed about him with a dazed, bewildered air, trying to collect his scattered senses.

"*Capitan!*" he cried, regarding him intently. "I have just dreamt that the shadow of a man came between you and a woman! I can't see their faces, but they are there!"

"Bah!" returned the Captain, rising to his feet and stretching wide his arms, preparatory to saddling his horse. "'Tis only the *aguardiente*, José!"

"Ah! do not jest, *Capitan!* Three times have I dreamed this dream — the shadow comes ever nearer!"

III

THE *Fiesta*, the "Feast of the Corn," had been declared, and there was dancing and feasting, and song and laughter on the lips of men as Captain Forest and José rode into Santa Fé late the following morning and turned their horses' heads in the direction of the *Posada de las Estrellas*, the Inn of the Stars, which was situated just outside the principal entrance to the town.

The low gray adobe walls of the houses fronting directly upon the narrow winding streets leading to and from the plaza were gay with the blossoms of the pink and scarlet geranium, honeysuckle, and gorgeous magenta of the bougainvilléa and golden cups of the trumpet-vine.

Pigeons fluttered from the house-tops to the streets, or hovered about the plaza and bosky *alamedas* of poplar, pepper and eucalyptus trees in search of stray grains of corn. Humming-birds and butterflies flashed their wings and gorgeous plumage in the sunshine as they darted in and out among the foliage in the *patios* and gardens at the rear of the houses, luxuriant with fruit and flowers as was attested by the orange and lemon, pomegranate and fig trees, heavy with ripening fruit and the delicately mingled perfume of orange and lemon blossoms, hyacinth, jasmine and Castilian rose.

Through the center of the town, beneath the walls

of the half-ruined convent, flowed the little river, Santa Maria, at whose banks young girls and women were wont to wash their linen and beat it out on the large, smooth stones which lay strewn along the water's edge. The notes of the wood-dove and oriole mingling with the silvery voice of the river, fell in rhythmical cadences upon the ears of the inhabitants who rested in the shady seclusion of their *patios* and gardens during the hour of the *siesta;* rolling and smoking *cigarillos* as they leisurely discussed the latest bit of news or gossip over their black coffee, *mescal* and *tequila,* or engaged in a game of *moles.*

There had been much rain that season, the best of reasons why the people should give thanks to the heavens and the fields receive the blessing of the Church as well as that of the gods of the *Indios* at whose altars the Red men still worship and upon which still is written "blood for blood," as in the days when the White men first came from the South, bearing the fire and thunderbolts of heaven with which they overthrew them. This was in fulfillment of the curse which the people had brought upon themselves. The fate which their ancient Sachems had foretold would overtake them in those days when they should forget the commands of the gods and neglect the land, and the hand of brother be lifted against brother until the coming of a Fair Child with a face like the sun unto whose words all men would hearken and their hearts be united in love.

According to custom, runners had been sent forth to the north, east, south and west to proclaim the annual *Fiesta.* For this ceremony the choicest ears were

selected from the new harvest, and, after being borne aloft in the procession that took place during the benediction of the fields, were placed in the churches where they remained until the following year. The golden ears represented the sunrise, the red, the sunset, the blue, the sky, the white, the clouds, and all together, their Mother, the Earth, from which they sprang.

As the season for rejoicing drew near, the *rancheros* of the neighboring *haciendas*, together with the Indians of the distant *pueblos* and half-wild hill tribes, chance strangers and adventurers, streamed toward Santa Fé and swarmed within her walls; some eager for trade and barter, but most of them bent upon pleasure. Her streets and plazas became a surging mass of struggling humanity, bright with the gay costumes of men and women. In her market-booths were displayed innumerable commodities; animals, fruit, vegetables, fowl — flowers, goldfish, caged finches, canaries — jewelry, rugs, stamped leathers and drawn-linen work — bright cloths, blankets, baskets and pottery — wines, laces, silks, satins, cigarettes and cigars.

Bidding was brisk and at times vehement, but always good humored. Sellers of lottery-tickets, writers of love-letters, jugglers and mountebanks plied their trades. The cries of the water-carrier and vender of sweet-meats mingled with those of the inevitable beggar who asked alms for the love of God; invoking blessings or curses upon the head of him who gave or refused him a *centavo*. Babel reigned. Donkies brayed, geese and turkeys hissed and gobbled, chickens cackled and fighting-cocks, tethered by the leg, strutted and crowed, while brown

children of all sizes and ages laughed and screamed as they chased one another in and out among the crowds or rolled in the dust beneath the pedestrian's feet.

Old Santa Fé, christened by the early Franciscan Friars, "City of the Blessed Faith," but in reality a fair wanton, a veritable Sodom and Gomorrha of iniquity with her *corridos*, her cock-pits and dance and gambling-halls, threw wide her gates and bade the stranger welcome; and if he did not receive the worth of his gold in pleasure and substance, surely it was no fault of Santa Fé's. Besides, it was only a step from a gaming-table to a Father Confessor.

The soul of old Spain still lived in the land. The click of castanettes was heard daily in her plazas and streets where the *fandango* and *jotta* were gayly danced; while at night the soft sounds of guitars and voices issued from out the deep shadow of her walls. Soft hands drew the latches of casements, and slender figures stepped out upon moon-lit balconies or beneath purple black heavens studded with myriads of golden stars, and passionate words and vows were exchanged under the cover of night.

Having passed the day at the Inn of the Stars, where they had been resting after the fatigues of the long night's ride, the Captain and José again directed their steps toward the town in the cool of the evening; José making for Pedro Romero's gambling-hall, the Captain for Carlos Moreno's theater, the *Theatro Mexicano*.

Owing to the tardiness of his arrival, he found the house packed to the doors. The performance, vaude-

ville in character, had already begun, and it was only after much elbowing and crowding that he finally succeeded in making his way to Carlos' private box where the latter awaited him.

A tall, dark woman had just ceased dancing, and as she paused before the footlights amid a burst of musical accompaniment, the audience with one impulse rose to its feet and gave vent to prolonged salvos of applause. Showers of glittering gold and silver coins, bouquets and wreaths of flowers were flung upon the stage, burying her feet in a wealth and suffusion of color as she stood smiling and bowing before the audience, vainly endeavoring to still the tumultuous applause which continued with deafening uproar until she consented to repeat the performance.

"Delicious — divine —'tis the Chiquita, *amigo mio!*" cried Carlos; pausing in the midst of his *vivas* to greet the Captain.

"You shall know her and fall in love with her like all the rest of the world —" but his speech was cut short by a fresh burst of applause from the audience. The floral tributes that had been showered upon her were hastily removed to one side of the stage and piled high against the wings. The musicians struck up their accompaniment and the dance began again.

It was evident that she was a favorite of the audience which perhaps partially accounted for the remarkable demonstration with which her performance was received. But be this as it may, Captain Forest felt that he had never witnessed such a remarkable exhibition of subtle grace and beauty and extraordinary execution and dash

as she displayed in the dance. He recalled the names of the famous dancers he had known, but none of them had risen to such heights — succeeded in vitalizing and inspiring their art with so much poetry and life.

To all appearance she was either Spanish or of Indian extraction, and yet there was a foreign touch about her that seemed to set her apart from the women of Santa Fé.

Who was she, this unknown genius, this master of the terpsichorean art, living in this far away Mexican town? Such talent could not remain in obscurity for long. Another great Spanish dancer was about to burst unheralded upon the world. It only remained for her to dance into it — to captivate and conquer it.

This then, was the surprise Carlos had promised him if he came to the theater that evening. His curiosity was aroused, and he turned to him for an explanation, but he was no longer by his side; he had rushed behind the scenes to felicitate the dancer on her remarkable success.

The air was hot and stifling, and not caring to witness the remaining numbers on the programme, he took advantage of the intermission that followed the dance and left the theater.

Outside the air was deliciously cool. The moonlight and myriads of artificial lights strung across the streets and on the façades of the houses, together with the flaming torches in front of the many booths, lent the appearance of day to night as he slowly made his way through the surging crowds in the direction of Pedro

Romero's gambling-hall where Carlos had agreed to join him after the performance.

Pedro's establishment was the chief and only respectable place of its kind of which the town could boast. It was the resort of the better element of Santa Fé, and if one were looking for a friend or acquaintance, he was usually to be found there. The hall was spacious and well lighted with electricity and resplendent in gilt and mirrors.

The gay strains of a string band enlivened the scene as he entered. Clouds of tobacco smoke hung over the throngs that crowded round the gaming-tables to try their luck with the Goddess Chance.

José was playing roulette, and judging by the satisfied expression of his face which the Captain noted in passing, he rightly conjectured that luck was on his side.

Like Carlos, Pedro had taken a great fancy to the Captain, and had generously placed his private stock of wines and cigars at the latter's disposal. Many an evening had the three passed together smoking and drinking and chatting; Pedro and Carlos listening with rapt attention to the Captain's anecdotes and adventures of which he seemed to possess an inexhaustible store. The hall was greatly overcrowded, rendering it difficult to find an acquaintance, but as the Captain paused in the midst of the tables in order to obtain a better view of the faces about him, he felt a touch on the shoulder from behind and turning, saw Pedro, the object of his search.

"*Por Dios!* but I'm glad to see you again, *amigo!*" exclaimed the proprietor, a dark little man with a kindly face pitted by the smallpox. He grasped and shook the Captain warmly by the hand.

"How are you — when did you return?" he inquired; leading him to a table in one corner of the hall around which were seated a number of his friends who, on the appearance of the Captain, rose and greeted him effusively.

"*Mozo — mozo!*" shouted Pedro to the waiter, "a glass for the Captain!"

The others also had been to the theater, and like him, had left during the intermission following the dance. Naturally the dancer formed the sole topic of conversation.

"Had the Señor *Capitan* seen the Chiquita — had he ever seen such dancing before — what did he think of her?" And by the time Carlos appeared on the scene, all agreed that the latter's fortune was made — that he would soon desert the sleepy old town for a tour of the world with his newly found star of the footlights.

"A tour of the world — with the Chiquita?" echoed Carlos, a fat, broad-shouldered little man of mixed blood, pausing and pulling back a chair in the act of seating himself at the table.

"*Dios!* if such a thing were possible," he exclaimed, pushing his hat on the back of his head and surveying his companions with critical eyes, "I would not exchange it for the richest gold mine in Mexico! But," he added, seating himself at the table, "you don't

know the Chiquita, *mis amigos*. She is made of different stuff than that of the women who dance for a living."

To this last remark the company agreed.

"*Caramba* — how she danced!" he continued, taking a sip of *pulque*. "Had the house been as large as the plaza and the price of the seats doubled, there would not have been standing room left to accommodate the spectators."

"Aye!" broke in Miguel Torreno, a dark, wizened old Mexican with a face resembling a monkey's, "they say a thousand people were turned away at the doors."

"A thousand? Half the town, you mean!" returned Carlos, rolling a *cigarillo* between the tips of his stubby fingers.

"A pretty penny this dance of the Chiquita's must have cost you, Carlos Moreno," continued Miguel, his head cocked knowingly on one side, while he squinted over the rim of his glass between puffs of cigarette smoke.

"Three thousand *pesos d'oro*," answered Carlos. "But by the Virgin, it was worth it!"

"Three thousand *pesos d'oro!*" ejaculated his auditors with one breath. Old Miguel dropped his glass which fell with a crash, scattering its contents and fragments over the floor.

"Three thousand *pesos d'oro!*" he gasped. "*Alma de mi vida!* Soul of my life! 'tis the salary of a Bishop! Are you mad, Carlos Moreno?"

"Perhaps. But only Carlos Moreno can afford to pay such salaries during the *Fiesta*," he answered complacently, taking a fresh sip of *pulque*.

"How did you ever persuade her to dance?" asked Pedro. "It's not the first time you have made overtures to her."

"Ah, that's the mystery! I'd give something to know why she danced. You know," he continued, "it's the first time she has ever appeared in public."

"The first time?" interrupted the Captain in surprise. "Why — she possesses the composure of a veteran of the footlights."

"Just so," rejoined Carlos. "Nothing is more characteristic of her; she's at home everywhere. When I first saw her dance three years ago in the garden of the old *Posada* at the birthday fête of Señora Fernandez, I knew instantly that she was either possessed of the devil or the ancient muse of dance; also, why Don Felipe Ramirez went mad over her.

"*Dios!* she's a strange woman — almost mysterious at times!" he added reflectively, with a shrug of the shoulders and gesture of the hands. "I thought, of course, that it was the money she wanted when she finally consented to dance, but I'm not so sure of it now."

"What reason have you for supposing otherwise?" asked Pedro.

"Every reason. What do you think she did with the heap of gold and silver that was showered upon her by the audience?"

"What?" excitedly demanded old Miguel, who by this time had fortified himself with a fresh glass of *aguardiente*.

"Why, after it had been gathered up and handed

to her, she, without so much as looking at it, tossed it lightly into the center of the stage and bade the musicians and stage-hands remember her when they drank to their sweethearts to-night."

Captain Forest's interest began to be aroused.

"*Caramba* — 'tis strange!" muttered old Miguel, eyeing his glass meditatively; his head nodding slightly from the effects of too much liquor. "But what will Padre Antonio say when he hears of it? How fortunate he wasn't here to witness a sight that must have caused him the deepest humiliation. Poor man," he continued, assuming a sympathetic tone, "it is already the scandal of the town."

"Bah! what of that?" returned Carlos.

It was evident to all that the delights of the *Fiesta* were beginning to tell on the old man. Already it had been noted on previous occasions that an overindulgence in *aguardiente* usually invoked a religious frame of mind in him, but which in Miguel's case resembled rather the groping of a lost soul than the prophetic vision of the seer.

"What of that?" echoed Miguel, an ominous light flashing from his eyes. "Those golden *pesos* so lightly earned will just about pay for a thousand masses in order to avert excommunication and enable the Church to snatch the soul of the Chiquita from the fires of purgatory as a punishment for conduct unbecoming the ward of a priest."

"Bah! you talk like an infant, Miguel! What a sad, weary world this would be if there were only priests and churches in it and men did nothing all day long but

say aves and burn candles on altars," and Carlos lightly blew a ring of smoke toward the ceiling.

"Ah, yes, perhaps — *quien sabe, amigo mio?*" answered the old man dryly. "But the Church is the Church."

"Miguel, you are growing old," said Pedro, slapping him lightly on the back. "Have another glass!"

"I'm not old. I'm no older than the rest of you, and neither will I have another glass," retorted Miguel hotly, greatly irritated by the others' laughter.

"Ah!" he continued, wagging his head, and in a tone of bravado and offended dignity, "you think I can't get home alone, do you? I'll show you that Miguel Torreno is still as young as the rest of you!" And supporting himself with one hand on the table and the other on his stick, he rose from his seat with great difficulty.

"Miguel Torreno old, is he? A thousand devils!" A chorus of laughter greeted this last outburst as he turned unsteadily and swaying to and fro, slowly made his way through the crowd toward the door.

Just then a man at the next table rose with an oath. It was Juan Ramon, Major-domo of the Inn of the Stars. Juan Ramon, the handsome, the hawk, the gambler — the greatest *vaquero* in Chihuahua. The man who took delight in riding horses that other men feared — the man in whose hand the *riata* became a magic wand, a hissing serpent, and who could stretch a bull at full length upon the ground at a given spot within a given time.

"Has the blessed *Fiesta* brought you no luck, Juan?" inquired Carlos, tilting himself back in his chair and smiling up in the other's face.

"Luck — blessed *Fiesta?* The devil take them both!" exclaimed Juan, the look of disgust on his face gradually changing to one of resignation — that serene expression of the born gambler whom experience has taught that days of famine are certain to follow those of plenty.

"Look!" he repeated. "The cards are bewitched — not a *centavo!* My pockets are empty as Lazarus' stomach! Only a month ago I picked out a beautiful little *hacienda* with the fairest acreage to which I intended to retire and live like a *Caballero* — to-day I parted with my only horse at a loss — to-morrow," and he shrugged his shoulders indifferently, "if this sort of thing continues, I'll be forced to pawn the buttons on my breeches.

"*Mercedes Dios*, blessed be the *Fiesta!*" And flinging the end of his *zerape* over one shoulder and across the lower half of his face, he stalked toward the door; the laughter of his friends ringing in his ears.

IV

TEN years previous to the events just related, Padre Antonio, his parochial duties over for the day, was slowly retracing his steps homeward.

It was a mild, serene summer evening, and he paused before the massive iron gates set in the high adobe wall surrounding his garden for a last look at the sunset before entering his house.

It had been a strenuous day for Padre Antonio. Early that morning, Miguel Torreno while beating his mule, had been kicked half way across his corral by that stubborn though sensible animal, breaking Miguel's right arm and fracturing three of his ribs. But no sooner had it been ascertained that old Miguel would not die as he obstinately insisted that he would, calling frantically upon the Saints the while as the vision of purgatorial fires which he knew awaited him loomed before his distracted imagination, than the wives of Pedro Torlone and José Alvarez, neighbors and friends, quarreled over a cheap blue and white striped *ribosa*, embroiling their husbands who, without the Padre's intercession, would have come to blows.

Then the last sacrament had been administered to Don Juan Otero, one of Santa Fé's eldest and most respected citizens.

In a vain effort to banish the unpleasant recollections

of the day from his thoughts, Padre Antonio turned with a sigh from the glories of the sunset which he had been contemplating, and was on the point of entering the garden when his quick ear caught the sound of horse's hoofs on the road, causing him to pause with his hand on the latch of the gate.

His house being situated in an unfrequented quarter of the town, he decided to await the coming of the animal; the bearer perchance of some friend or acquaintance. He had not long to wait. The sounds drew nearer and nearer, and presently, greatly to his astonishment, a tall, gaunt, half-starved gray horse with a *riata* fastened to his lower jaw, and upon whose back sat an equally gaunt and haggard Indian woman with disheveled hair and clothes tattered and dust begrimed, came into view around the sharp angle of the wall and stopped directly before him.

Never in all his long and varied experience had he witnessed such a pitiable spectacle as the woman presented. The wild, hollow eyes and wasted, emaciated form and features gave her more the appearance of some wild beast than a human being. She did not appear to be conscious of his presence; and before he had time to recover from his surprise or utter a word, she stretched both arms out before her as if toward the sun, and uttering a wild, harsh, inarticulate cry, dropped unconscious from the horse's back into his arms.

Experience had taught Padre Antonio to act quickly in cases of emergency, and with the assistance of his gardener and Manuela, his old Indian housekeeper, he

carried her into the house and laid her upon his own bed. For days she lay in a delirium, the result of the terrible privations she had evidently endured. She raved and talked incoherently in a language which neither he nor Manuela understood.

The doctors whom he summoned at the outset, only shook their heads, and after a lengthy consultation informed him with the stoicism characteristic of the profession that, the patient would either die or recover. But Padre Antonio did not despair. In his extremity he turned to heaven, nor did his petition pass unheeded. At length, after many days of anxious watching, the fever left her and she sank into a deep, refreshing sleep from which she did not awaken for many hours.

It was toward the dawn of a Sabbath, and as the calm and peace of sleep settled upon her, her wasted and emaciated features began gradually to assume their normal outline. Nature asserted herself, and when the large dark eyes finally opened once more, it was into the face of a beautiful girl that Padre Antonio found himself gazing as he knelt by her bedside in prayer.

"Be quiet, my daughter," he involuntarily murmured as her eyes rested upon his, without considering whether she understood him. But the faint semblance of a smile that lit up her countenance in response to his words told him she comprehended. Then, during the long days of convalescence that ensued, she imparted her history to him in broken Spanish.

She was a Tewana; the daughter of their War Chief, the Whirlwind, who had been killed recently in battle

with another Indian tribe, the Ispali. Just previous to this, her people who had long been at war with the Government, had been defeated by the Mexican troops. After the battle the entire tribe with the exception of the Whirlwind's band made peace with the Government; the remnant of the latter with which she remained, escaping into the mountains. But fate had doomed the little fleeing band to extermination. It was surprised and annihilated by the Ispali Chieftain, the White Wolf, and his followers whose territory they had invaded; she being the only one spared — the White Wolf signifying his intention of making her one of his wives. But that same night when the Chieftain entered the lodge he had set apart for her and began to make advances to her, she suddenly snatched a brand from the fire which burned in the center of the lodge and struck him over the head, knocking him senseless.

Then, stealing forth from the lodge, she mounted the Chieftain's horse which stood tethered just outside the door and fled under cover of the night. For days she fled across the deserts and mountains, concealing herself during the daytime and traveling at night; subsisting as best she could upon the wild roots and berries which she was able to find. But the privations which she was forced to endure — the lack of food and water, night vigils and exposure to the weather, began to tell on her. She became delirious, and no longer able to guide her horse, was obliged to let him choose his own course, and — Padre Antonio knew the rest.

Surely God had led this fair heathen child to his

very door in order that he, Padre Antonio, might snatch her soul from the flames of hell by directing her in the way of the true faith. There could be no doubt of it; God's handiwork was too apparent.

Padre Antonio was a liberal, broad-minded man. Having experienced most things that fall to the lot of men, he did not believe in restraining her against her will in order that her conversion might be accomplished as many a zealous priest might have considered justifiable in her case. But should she manifest a desire to remain with him, she would be reared in the very lap of Mother Church. With this project in mind, it was with the greatest solicitude that he watched her recovery, and when she was informed that she would be permitted to return to her own people if she so desired, he won her confidence completely.

The last vestige of that barrier of restraint and suspicion which the strangeness of her position had reared between them was swept away.

From that moment the wild little nomad of the desert evinced the keenest interest in her new surroundings. Her childish delight was unbounded on beholding for the first time in her life the strange flowers and fruits in the garden. They were all so new and wonderful to her, and she wandered for hours among them; touching and plucking them and tasting and inhaling their fragrance.

Whether it was the novelty of her position, or her sudden and passionate attachment to Padre Antonio whom she regarded in the light of a new-found father that caused her to forget for the time her former wild

life and consent to remain with him, is difficult to determine.

Padre Antonio who had lived many years among the wild tribes of the country and knew them as few men did, their insatiable love of liberty and intense dislike of the White man's civilization, looked upon her conversion and decision to remain with him as another direct intervention of Providence; for that which usually required years had been accomplished in as many weeks in her case. It was little short of a miracle, and he rejoiced exceedingly and began gradually to unfold his plans to her concerning her future.

The curriculum of the Convent of Saint Claire in Santa Fé did not seem adequate, and nothing would do, but that he should accompany her to the City of Mexico, where he placed her in charge of the Sisters of Saint Ursula. There she would have not only the educational, but the social advantages which the city offered.

Before their departure he christened her, Chiquita Pia Maria Roxan Concepcion Salvatore; a name which, out of gratitude and obedience to her benefactor, she accepted without question concerning either its origin or his reason for giving it to her.

Six years passed, during which she traveled for three summers in Europe with friends of the Padre. Interminably long years they seemed to him. Each year he had planned to visit her, but each time something intervened to prevent his going. He was a busy man. His duties required annual visits to the outlying *pueblos* and distant Indian Missions, consuming

his entire time. However, he at length received word from the Sisters of Saint Ursula that Chiquita had completed her course of studies and had started on her return journey to Santa Fé.

It was evident from the reports which he had received at regular intervals from the Sisters that she did not care for the Church as he had fondly hoped she might. But after all, what did it really matter?

One so young and gay could not be expected to take life so seriously. When one grew old, one became serious enough for this world; and he smiled as he thought of his wild little Indian girl.

In his fond imagination, he saw her large, mischievous, dark eyes snap, and heard the merry peals of her laughter as she flitted about the garden in former years. Surely it was better thus — that she should remain blithe and happy like the birds, as God had created her.

The years had begun to tell on the aged Manuela. She was beginning to show signs of failing, and he decided that Chiquita, his ward, should live with him and rule his household in Manuela's stead. His wants were so few and simple that she would have little to do and old Manuela would be able to sun herself in the garden during the remaining years of her life; a reward for her long and faithful service. Nor was Manuela adverse to this new arrangement which must eventually deprive her of all authority in the household; a position she had guarded so jealously through the years and which had raised her in the estimation of the community. Although of a different people, the common racial blood bond had drawn the two women

together from the first; besides, she could always assist in the lighter work of the household if she chose.

The Padre never tired of meditating upon this fond dream during his leisure moments. What a perpetual source of joy and satisfaction the presence and sunshine of this child of his own molding would be to him in his old age! Besides he would always be near her to administer spiritual council and guidance.

So, when the day of her arrival finally dawned, he and old Manuela rose with the sun, and gathering the freshest and brightest flowers the garden contained, they arranged them in the room she was to occupy; transforming it into a veritable bower of fragrance and color.

The prospect of seeing his protegée so soon again, filled Padre Antonio with the most conflicting emotions of longing and impatience.

He could think of nothing else — could neither sit nor stand, but fretted and bustled about the house with the impatience of a child. Fearful lest he should be too late, he hurried through his simple breakfast, consisting of black coffee and a roll, without so much as glancing at the local paper as was his wont; and then, quite forgetting to pull on his black silk gloves which Manuela thrust into his hands together with his hat and stick, he hastened to the station which he reached an hour before the time scheduled for the arrival of the stage.

Of course she must have changed somewhat during the long interval of her absence, he argued, more as a concession to reason than to desire or sentiment.

But in spite of this possibility, his mental picture of her still remained that of the little Indian girl he had confided to the care of the good Sisters of Saint Ursula six years before.

What if the stage were late, and could she make the long journey alone and in safety, he asked himself a thousand times as he impatiently paced up and down the platform of the station; the tap of his gold-headed cane marking the time of his steps on the boards beneath him.

"Saints! but the stage was slow! A snail could crawl —" Suddenly he stopped short. A flush of joy suffused his countenance — his heart began to beat rapidly and his right hand with which he grasped his cane trembled perceptibly as he gazed intently down the long dusty highroad.

"At last!" he cried. Another intense moment of suspense and the distant cracking of a whip and sounds of wheels and hoof-beats on the road announced the approach of the stage. Presently it hove in sight and a few minutes later, as it drew up before the station and came to a full stop, the door was hastily flung open and a tall, closely veiled woman sprang lightly to the platform.

Her striking appearance would have commanded attention anywhere, but without noticing her, he brushed hastily past her and gazed eagerly into the interior of the coach. It was empty.

Dios! what had happened? There must be some mistake! With a note of keenest disappointment in his voice he turned sharply on the driver and impatiently

demanded what had become of the little Indian girl that had been placed in his charge.

"Little Indian girl? *Caramba!*" A look of bewilderment accompanied by a shrug of the shoulders and a "*no sabe*, Señor Padre," was the only answer he received. Consternation seized Padre Antonio.

Merciful heaven! what had become of her — Chiquita, his little girl? His voice choked, while tears of bitter disappointment welled to his eyes. "Ah, yes, there had been a mistake — she would come by the next stage," he said, addressing the driver, and was on the point of turning away when a silvery peal of laughter fell upon his ears. He felt a soft touch on his shoulder and a voice close to him said:

"Padre Antonio, don't you know your little Chiquita?" The veil had slipped from her face, displaying the features of a beautiful Spanish woman. Confounded and speechless with amazement, Padre Antonio could only gaze in silence upon the apparition before him.

Was it possible, or was he only dreaming? What a transformation! Was this mature woman, this tall and supple and refined and graceful creature his Chiquita, his wild little Indian girl of former years? He rubbed his eyes in bewilderment and gazed again. Holy Maria! but she was beautiful — fair as the starry jasmine blossoms which she wore at her breast and in the dark folds of her hair.

In that hour the world suddenly became filled with exquisite harmony for Padre Antonio, and he seemed to grow younger by many years.

The radiant beauty of her face with the poetry of sunshine and laughter in her eyes and her grace and charm of personality affected him like some wonderfully attuned chime of silver bells. Surely this was worth waiting for. His prayers had been answered richly and abundantly, far beyond anything his imagination had pictured during those long years of waiting.

V

THE *Posada de las Estrellas* was situated on the western side of the town within a stone's throw of Padre Antonio's house. It stood well back from the highroad from which it was screened by a thick hedge-like growth of cedar, manzanita, tamarisk and lilac bushes.

A short distance east of the *Posada*, the highroad entered the long *Alameda* which led to the plaza in the center of the town, overlooked by the old *Precedio* or Governor's palace.

The widespreading branches of two immense cottonwood trees, the trunk of one of which was encircled by a rustic bench, cast an inviting shade in front of the house and wide veranda which stretched its length along two sides of the low, one storied adobe structure. Honeysuckle and white clematis and pink and scarlet passion vines clambered up its slender pillars and hung in fragrant flowering festoons from the low balustrades above. The fresh green leaves of the nasturtium, bright with variegated blossoms, ranging from deep scarlet to gold and pale yellow, trailed along the ground at the foot of the veranda and skirted the narrow pathway which led to the rear of the *Posada* whose *patio* looked out upon a garden interspersed with innumerable flowers and shrubs, fruit and cedar trees, and

whose soft green lawn was intersected by narrow gravel pathways. Just back of the garden lay the vegetable patches which intervened between it and the stables and corrals, whence came the cackling of hens and cooing of pigeons in the early morning.

Originally the *Posada* had been one of the large *haciendas* adjoining Santa Fé, but its mistress, Señora Fernandez, had transformed it into an Inn after the death of her husband who had been killed accidentally by the fall of his horse. Finding herself in reduced circumstances incurred by her husband's gambling propensities, she resolved upon the change. His chief legacy consisting of debts, she was obliged to part with the greater portion of the estate, but her natural executive ability stood her in good stead.

The new enterprise prospered, and the Inn became widely known throughout the country as a place at which to stop if only for a cup of chocolate or a chat with the Señora who always knew the latest gossip.

In her youth she had been noted for her beauty, and even now, in spite of middle-age and somewhat faded features, the latter the result of the struggle she had undergone to reëstablish herself in the world, she was still considered buxom and fair to look upon by the majority of men. She carried her head high and with a coquettish air which plainly showed she had by no means relinquished her hold upon life.

On this particular morning she looked unusually well as she moved about the *patio* engaged with her women in assorting a huge basket of freshly laundered household linen. Not a strand of silver was visible

in her jet black hair, adorned with a large tortoise-shell comb and a single Castilian rose. Her gay, low-necked, short sleeved bodice, exposing her shapely neck and arms, harmonized well with her short, black silken *saya* which rustled with every movement she made and from beneath which protruded a small pair of high insteped feet encased in black slippers ornamented with large quaint silver buckles.

It was the Señora's birthday. She had risen earlier than usual prepared to receive the congratulations of her friends who, she knew, would be sure to call during the day in honor of the occasion. A few of them would be asked to remain and dine with her in the evening.

It was on a similar occasion that Chiquita had danced in the *patio* before her guests.

The innate vanity of the woman might have led one to suppose that she would let the years pass unnoticed, but not so. The old, time-honored custom of the country must be observed lest her friends might say: Señora Fernandez is already laying by for a ripe old age, the mere suggestion of which on the part of the world would have been enough to throw her into one of those uncontrollable fits of rage for which she was noted.

Artful, shrewd and scheming though she was, her susceptibility to flattery was her weak point, amounting almost to a mania. To be told that she still looked as young and handsome as in the days when the years justified the statement, was to win her immediate esteem. The lack of this servile attitude and cringing civility

on Chiquita's part, together with the knowledge of her own superiority which she never hesitated to show when occasion required, had drawn down the Señora's enmity upon her. Whereas, an occasional soft word or smile of acquiescence — she demanded so little — would have smoothed her ruffled spirit and taken the edge off her tongue, the sharpest in Santa Fé.

It was not easy for the inveterate coquette and one time reigning belle to resign the position she had held so long and undisputed, especially to an alien — one whom the full blooded Spaniard inwardly despises, regards as of an inferior race.

How she hated the dark woman, envied the glances and flatteries and attentions which she always received wherever she went. It was said, that on Chiquita's return from school, Señora Fernandez suddenly grew cold and haughty toward the world, but finding that a proud exterior availed her little, she sulked and pouted for a time like a spoiled child, only to warm again to the world which she loved so passionately, which she felt slipping from her and without whose adulation she could not live.

Dios de mi vida! but it was terrible to grow old! Not since the death of her husband, Don Carlos, had she endured so bitter a pang. The fact that she had never had any children accounted perhaps for a certain harshness in her nature.

It was a busy day for the Señora. Besides the care of her guests, the preparing of freshly killed fowl and baking of cakes and *tortillas*, there was the garden which must be hung with lanterns where there would

be the usual dancing and merrymaking during the evening. All this and much more the Señora must superintend, but she was equal to the task.

As she issued her orders to the retinue of servants that came and went, she carried on a lively, though interrupted, conversation with her sister, Señora Rosario Sanchez, and her niece, Dolores, who had come to assist her in the preparations.

"It has come at last — I always said it would — I never trusted that double nature of hers!" she exclaimed triumphantly, pausing for an instant in her work of assorting the linen. The expression and gesture of Señora Sanchez plainly bespoke the shock she also had experienced.

"To think of it," she gasped. "How Padre Antonio can overlook such a breach of confidence and offense to the Church is more than I can understand!"

"Ah! that shows the extent of her influence over him," answered Señora. "She has bewitched him with her wild ways — he simply dotes on her!"

"It's scandalous!" broke in her sister.

"To my mind, it shows signs of the Padre's failing," rejoined the Señora sharply.

"It does indeed — poor man!" sighed her sister. "And what's more — it never did seem proper that so handsome a woman should live with a priest even though she be his ward and he an old man."

"Handsome?" sneered the Señora, drawing herself together as though she had received an electric shock; the pleased and animated expression of her face changing suddenly to one of utmost frigidity. "I never

could understand why people considered that Indian good looking," and her black eyes snapped as she turned to resume her work, plainly betraying the jealousy aroused. Señora Sanchez, knowing her sister's temper only too well, hastened to change the subject.

Strange to say, Padre Antonio did not share the public's sentiment, or rather that of his own particular flock, concerning Chiquita's latest escapade. Instead of being overwhelmed, broken in spirit and utterly cast down by grief and shame as had been confidently predicted, he, much to the disgust of his congregation, went calmly about his duties as though nothing unusual had occurred, referring jocosely to this lark of his madcap ward as he was pleased to term it.

Lark? Heavens! had the Padre lost his senses? Excommunication might be a little too severe, but a year's solitary confinement in a convent as a penance for her sin was the least penalty she could expect.

But Padre Antonio knew what the rest of the world did not. That his charming, irrepressible protegée would have snapped her fingers lightly at the mere suggestion of either. The days of mediæval suppression of females had come to an end even in Mexico. Moreever, there existed a perfect understanding between the two.

During his long years of missionary work he had learned that the heathen often stood higher in the sight of Heaven than many a zealous devotee of the Church. Besides, dancing was not only a national pastime of the Spaniard, but among Indians, a part of their religion as well.

That Chiquita had some very good reason for dancing in public, he knew well enough. They understood one another perfectly, and he did not ask her her reason for dancing, knowing full well that some day she would tell him of her own accord.

Although Chiquita had accommodated herself marvelously well to the new conditions, imbibing the best civilization had to offer, she nevertheless remained the freeborn woman — the descendant of a freeborn race of men. The wild, free nomad whom experience and direct contact with nature had early taught to recognize the simple underlying truths and realities of life and their relations to one another, was not to be measured by the conventions or limited standards of a tamer race of men hedged about by superficial traditions and born and reared remote from the heart of nature beneath the roofs of houses. It was the cold, hard earth and equally cold and unrelenting stars that had nurtured Chiquita from earliest childhood, and to apply the petty restraints and conventions of modern society to her was like clipping the wings of an eagle and then expecting it to fly.

Ordinarily, life is dull enough without civilized man's efforts to reduce it to positive boredom, and although Chiquita's escapades had acted like a slap in the face, they had nevertheless done much to arouse the spirit of the otherwise sleepy old town. Her presence was fresh and invigorating as the north wind. Moreover, the very ones who criticised her most in secret, were usually the first to come to her for advice when in

trouble. For who was so wise as the strange, beautiful woman?

True, it cost something to be hated as cordially as one was admired, nevertheless, Padre Antonio rightly conjectured that there was not a woman in Santa Fé who would not willingly exchange places with his ward were she able to. So, like the sensible man that he was, he only smiled at idle gossip and continued to watch with increasing interest the transformation of his protegée.

VI

CAPTAIN FOREST had taken quarters at the *Posada* for an indefinite period; at least until he learned the whereabouts of his friend, Dick Yankton, who had accompanied him on his former expeditions.

He had been aroused at an early hour by the cackling of affrighted fowl and the voices and footsteps of *peons* as they came and went in the *patio*, their jests and laughter mingling with snatches of song. Not being able to sleep, he arose, and after a hasty toilet, stepped out upon the veranda, bright with the morning sunlight. Save for his presence, the place was deserted; the empty chairs standing about just as their occupants of the previous evening had left them, a proof that he was the first of the guests to be abroad.

"I wonder where Dick is?" he soliloquized, leisurely descending the veranda steps and turning into the pathway that led to the garden at the rear of the house and thence to the corrals, whither he directed his steps for a look at his horse to see whether he had been properly cared for during the night. As he disappeared around the corner of the house, a woman turned in from the highroad and paused before the Inn beneath the great cotton-wood encircled by the bench.

She was tall and slender and on one arm carried a basket of eggs concealed beneath a layer of freshly

cut roses; Padre Antonio's annual birthday tribute to the Señora. Her heavy blue-black hair, loosely caught up at the back of the neck and adorned with a bunch of pink passion flowers nestled about her neck and shoulders, on one of which was perched a small white dove that fluttered and cooed. From out the midst of the passion flowers shone a faint glint of silver.

Her dull white shirt waist, low at the neck and with sleeves rolled back to the elbows, exposed her long, slender neck and well rounded forearms which, like her face, were a rich red bronze. A faded orange kerchief, loosely knotted, encircled her neck; the ends thrust carelessly into her breast. Her soft mauve *saya*, worn and patched and looped up at one side, disclosing a faded blue petticoat underneath, fell to her ankles, displaying a pair of small feet encased in dull blue stockings and low black shoes.

Depositing the basket on the bench, she extended her right hand upon the back of which the dove immediately hopped, cooing and fluttering as before.

"*Cara mia!*" she murmured fondly, raising it to her lips, kissing it and caressing it gently against her cheek.

"What wouldst thou — thou greedy little Jaquino? Knowest not thou hast had one more berry than thy sweet little Jaquina?" But the dove only continued to flutter and coo on her hand.

"Hearest thou not," she continued, "she already calls thee!" And extending her lips, between which she had inserted a fresh berry, the dove eagerly seized and devoured it.

"Ah, *querida mia!*" she murmured softly, kissing it again. "Now fly away quickly like a good little Jaquino before some wicked señor comes to catch thee for his breakfast!" And tossing the dove lightly into the air with an "*á Dios,*" it hovered over her head for an instant, then flew straight away over the old *Posada* back to Padre Antonio's garden where its mate awaited it.

A sigh escaped her as she watched the flight of the bird. How free of the cares and responsibilities of the world the winged creatures seemed. She turned to the bench once more and was in the act of picking up her basket, when her attention was suddenly arrested by the sound of footsteps close at hand, and wheeling around, she came face to face with Captain Forest.

The little cry of surprise that escaped her interrupted the Captain's meditations who, with eyes cast on the ground, might otherwise have walked straight into her.

"A thousand pardons, Señorita!" he exclaimed in Spanish, stopping abruptly and raising his hat.

"I—" He paused as her full gaze met his which to his surprise was almost on a level with his own. What a face! Could his sensations have been analyzed, they might have coincided with those of Padre Antonio's on beholding his protegée when she stepped from the stagecoach on her return from the convent.

The broad sweep of her brow, her penetrating gaze, her straight nose, high cheek bones and delicately molded lips and chin and grace of her supple, sinuous body, together with the picturesqueness of her costume, presented a picture of striking beauty.

"Why," he continued abruptly, "you are the woman that danced at Carlos Moreno's! The Señorita Chiquita about whom the whole town is talking!"

"Ah! you saw me dance, Señor?" she asked, betraying a slight embarrassment.

"I wouldn't have missed it for the world! Such a performance — I —" again he paused, regarding her intently. "Do you know, Señorita, all the while I watched you dance there seemed to be something familiar about you. It seemed as though I had seen you somewhere before."

"Yes?" she queried, her dark eyes glowing and a faint flush mounting to her cheeks.

"Yes," he answered. "Ever since then I have been trying to think where it could have been. Ah!" he exclaimed, stepping backwards and eyeing her critically. "Just turn your head that way again. There, that's it! I knew I had seen you before! Do you remember the night we met a year ago on the trail below La Jara?"

A smile parted her full rose-red lips, displaying her pearly teeth. "I remember it well, Señor," she answered, casting down her eyes for an instant. "I recognized you the instant I saw you."

"Strange," he muttered half to himself. Then, after a rather embarrassing silence, he said: "That was a fine horse you rode. Do you live here at the *Posada*, Señorita?"

"No. I live with Padre Antonio."

"Padre Antonio? Ah, yes!" he exclaimed, recall-

ing the conversation at Pedro Romero's gambling hall. "Tell me," he continued, "who is Padre Antonio?"

"Ah! I see you have not been long in Santa Fé, Señor, else you must have heard something about him. Everybody knows Padre Antonio — he is our priest."

"Both you and he must have been absent when I was here before, otherwise I must have met you," he answered.

At this moment the tall figure of a man, dressed in a suit of light gray material with a soft felt hat to match, appeared in the doorway of the Inn. His eyes, like his hair and mustache, were dark brown. His hands were long and slender and delicate as a woman's, yet there was nothing effeminate in his appearance. His strong, sensitive features and roving, piercing eyes and alert carriage indicated courage and energy.

He paused as he caught sight of the two figures before him. Then, with an exclamation of surprise, he stepped quickly out on to the veranda. "Jack!" he exclaimed. "When did you get here?"

Turning swiftly, Captain Forest saw Dick Yankton standing before him. "Dick!" he cried, and rushing up the veranda steps, seized him by both hands. "I've been wondering where I would find you! You evidently didn't get my letter?"

"No," replied his companion. "I only returned from the mountains late last night. It's probably waiting for me here."

"The Señores know one another?" interrupted Chiquita, also ascending the veranda.

"Know one another? Señorita, we are brothers," said Dick.

"Brothers?" she echoed, surprised and perplexed.

"Yes, Señorita, all but in name," interposed the Captain.

"Ah! I see. Brothers in fortune!"

"Exactly," replied Dick. "But what is all this I hear concerning your doings, Señorita? I'd have given my best horse to have seen you dance, but, as you see, I'm too late. A pretty nest of hornets you've stirred up in the old place," he continued. "Why, last evening I met the Navaros on the road on their way home and they wouldn't let me pass until they had told me how wicked you were. Señora Navaro even crossed herself and said an ave at the first mention of your name."

"Ah," she sighed, then laughed unconcernedly. "I'm afraid I've been very naughty, Señor." Then suddenly recollecting her mission, she exclaimed: "I almost forgot why I came here this morning. I'm the bearer of Padre Antonio's gift and greetings to the Señora. It's her birthday, you know."

"Her birthday? I wonder she still dares have them!" exclaimed Dick.

"She does, nevertheless," laughed Chiquita; and brushing back the roses in her basket with a sweep of the hand, she disclosed the eggs beneath. "Look," she continued. "Padre Antonio's gift! Are they not beautiful — just fresh from the hens! You had better have some for your breakfast, Señor," she added.

"By all the Saints in the calendar, they are pearls,

every one of them!" returned Dick enthusiastically, eyeing the contents of the basket. "Thrice blessed be thy hens, Señorita! We'll have eggs with our chocolate out here on the veranda!"

"I thought so!" came a sharp voice from the other side of the doorway just behind them, "as usual, talking with the Señores!" and Señora Fernandez, with flushed cheeks and a spiteful gleam in her eyes which she took no pains to conceal, stepped from the door into the light.

"*Buenas dias*, Doña Fernandez!" said Chiquita, unabashed by the Señora's sudden appearance and onslaught, "may the day bring you many blessings! Look! Padre Antonio's greetings," and she held up the basket for the Señora's benefit. Then, with a subtle sarcasm which she knew would avenge her amply for the Señora's unprovoked attack, she said: "I stopped to inquire what the Señores would have for their breakfast. They say they will have eggs with their chocolate."

"Indeed! Eggs and chocolate — chocolate and eggs!" angrily retorted the Señora, "just as though one didn't know what everybody takes for breakfast!" But without waiting for her to finish, Chiquita vanished through the doorway with her basket; her low laughter, followed by a snatch of song just audible from within, serving to increase the Señora's irritation.

"Holy God! I sometimes think the devil is inside of that girl!" she exclaimed, vexed beyond measure.

"Ah, but what a sweet one!" laughed Dick. "I wouldn't mind being possessed of the same myself."

"Bah, Señor! you talk like a fool!" she retorted. "I pray you, do not think too poorly of us, Señor *Capitan*," she continued in an apologetic tone, turning to Captain Forest. "I assure you, all the women in Santa Fé are not so bold as the Señorita Chiquita."

"No, most of them are a tame lot!" broke in Dick, secretly enjoying the Señora's discomfiture.

"*Caramba!* your speech grows more foolish as you talk, Señor!" returned the Señora in a tone of intense disgust. "I see, you too have fallen under her spell. They say she has the evil-eye, Señor *Capitan*," she went on, addressing the Captain again.

"Evil-eye — ha, ha! What next?" laughed Dick.

"Blood of the Saints! I'll no longer waste my time with you, Señor!" and with an angry swish of her skirt, she turned and disappeared in the house.

VII

"WHAT does she mean by the evil-eye?" asked the Captain after the sounds of the Señora's footsteps had died away in the corridor within the house.

"Nothing — it's only jealousy. Chiquita being the acknowledged belle of the town, most of the other women, especially those of pure Spanish blood, are jealous as cats of her, and seldom miss an opportunity of saying spiteful things about her. That's why her dancing has caused such a row. And yet," he continued, seating himself on the veranda rail, his back against one of its wooden pillars, "I can't see why. It's race hatred of course, but there's really no reason for it because she's the best educated woman between here and the City of Mexico. Padre Antonio saw to it that she received the best Mexico had to give. Why, she speaks French and English almost as well as she does Spanish. If she were a *mestiza* or half-caste, things would go hard with her, but being a full-blood, she's easily a match for them all."

"She's certainly an unusual woman," said the Captain; "one you would hardly expect to find in this out-of-the-way place."

"Oh, that's one of the many paradoxes in life," answered Dick. "I've met many a remarkable personality in the most remote regions during my wanderings.

But," he continued, abruptly changing the topic of conversation, " what brings you back here? I always felt you would come back to this country again. Civilization isn't all it's cracked up to be, is it? "

" It was a hard wrench just the same," returned the Captain, " especially when one —"

" Did you hear that? " suddenly interrupted Dick, rising from his seat on the veranda rail and gazing intently down the highroad. The sounds of a vehicle and hoof-beats on the hard road, mingled with the shouts of a driver, the crack of a whip and tinkle of bells, were distinctly heard, and presently, a heavy lumbering stage-coach enveloped in a cloud of white dust and drawn by four mules was seen coming down the road at full gallop.

The sounds had also aroused the household. Señora Fernandez at the head of a troop of *peons* and women rushed out of the house, talking and gesticulating excitedly as they swarmed over the veranda and down the steps in front of the *Posada*, for all the world like a distracted colony of ants.

" *Dios!* what can have happened to the stage that it comes in the morning instead of the evening? " she cried breathlessly, quite forgetting her recent ill humor in the excitement.

" There's no stage at this hour," said Dick.

" But there it comes! " answered the Captain.

" It's not the regular stage," returned Dick; " a party of tourists, most likely! I see a lot of women! " he added, as the occupants on the outside of the stage came more clearly into view.

Suddenly Captain Forest started, gasped, and gripped

one of the veranda pillars with his right hand. "No — it can't be!" he muttered, passing his free hand across his eyes as though to dispel an illusion.

"What's the matter, Jack?" asked Dick.

"God in heaven! what can have brought them here?" he cried, ignoring his companion's question and leaning out over the veranda rail, his gaze riveted on the stage.

"Friends of yours?" asked Dick again.

"Friends? It's the whole family!"

Dick gave a prolonged whistle.

The women and *peons*, clamoring vociferously, instantly surrounded the stage as it drew up before the *Posada* with a great clatter of wheels and hoofs; assisting its occupants to alight and carrying the luggage into the house.

On the box beside the driver sat Blanch Lennox, looking a trifle pale the Captain thought, and Bessie Van Ashton, his cousin, a pretty blond with large violet eyes and small hands and feet that matched her slender, willowy figure.

"Is this the infernal place?" came a voice from the interior of the coach that sounded more like a snarl of a wild beast than a human voice. "If ever I pass another night in such a damned ark —" came the voice again, as its possessor, Colonel Van Ashton, enveloped in a much wrinkled traveling coat, stepped with difficulty from the coach to the ground. "I'm so stiff I can hardly walk! Ough!" he cried, and his right hand went to his back as a fresh spasm of pain seized him.

"It's just what I told you it would be like! The

country's beastly — beastly!" and Mrs. Forest, white with dust and completely exhausted by the journey, followed the Colonel, supported on either side by her maid and her brother's valet.

"Merciful God! they must be very grand people to talk so foolish!" ejaculated the Señora who knew enough English to grasp the import of Mrs. Forest's words. Although she had never devoted much time to the study of the language, she had picked up a smattering of English from the Americans and Englishmen who annually stopped at the *Posada* on their way to the mines in the interior of the country in which much foreign capital was invested.

"Why, there's Jack!" cried Bessie, dropping lightly from the box into the arms of two *peons* who stood below to assist her to the ground.

"Hello, Jack!" she continued, advancing, "I'll wager you didn't expect to see us this morning, did you?"

The Captain noted the ring of sarcasm in her voice as she concluded.

"I confess I did not, Cousin," he answered, descending the veranda to meet them. "What in the world brought you here?" he asked, taking his cousin's hand.

"Oh! we thought we'd like to see a little more of the world before we became too old to enjoy traveling," she answered, with a peculiar little laugh that was all her own and which usually conveyed a sense of uneasiness to those toward whom it was directed.

"How much longer are you going to stand there asking idiotic questions?" broke in Mrs. Forest with a

furious glance at her son. "Can't you see, I'm nearly dead?"

"Really, Mother, I'm very sorry," returned the Captain, "but it's all your own fault, you know. Why did you come?"

"Our fault — why did we come? It's your fault — your fault, sir!" she almost screamed, and ended by laughing hysterically.

Colonel Van Ashton who had been nursing his wrath all night long while being bumped over a rough road in an old broken-down stagecoach, required but the sight of his nephew to cause an explosion. He had not closed his eyes during the entire night, and like his sister, Mrs. Forest, was in a state of collapse. His usually florid complexion had turned to a brilliant crimson, giving him the appearance of an overheated furnace.

He regarded himself as a martyr, nay, worse — an innocent victim of fate who, entirely against his will, had been cruelly dragged into the present intolerable situation by the caprice of his accursed nephew.

He had suffered long and patiently all that mortal flesh and blood could endure. But, thank God, there were compensations in this life after all — the object of his wrath stood before him at last.

"So this, sir, is what you call returning to nature, is it?" he cried in a hoarse roar, controlling his voice with difficulty and glaring savagely at his nephew.

"It's evidently not to your liking, Uncle," replied the Captain quietly, doing his best to keep from laughing in his face.

"Liking"— roared the Colonel again, his voice

raised to the breaking pitch —" I never thought I'd get to hell so soon! Why, sir," he continued, knocking a cloud of dust from his hat, " this isn't nature, this is geology! I don't see how you ever discovered the damned country! The wind-swept wastes of Dante's Inferno are verdant in comparison! You're mad, there's no doubt of it!" he fumed, stamping up and down.

" Do you know," he went on, stopping abruptly before his nephew, " they say that, before you left Newport, you ran your touring-car over the cliff into the sea — a machine that must have cost you fifteen thousand at least!"

" Well, what if I did? It served me right for deserting my horse for the devil's toy. Thank God, I'm rid of the infernal machine!"

" Look here, Jack Forest —" but the Colonel's voice broke in a violent fit of coughing.

It required but little discernment on the part of the Mexicans to perceive that the meeting between Captain Forest and his family was not what might be termed particularly felicitous. Even Señora Fernandez was quick enough to perceive that things were going from bad to worse, and in an effort to smooth matters, she stepped forward and in her best English said: " Señor *Capitan*, why did you tell me not zat ze ladies were coming? I might 'ave prepared been for zem."

" My good Señora," responded the Captain, regarding her with a look of extreme compassion, " I never dreamt of such a misfortune."

" Just the sort of answer one might expect from you! Not a word of welcome or sympathy! I always said you

were the most selfish mortal alive!" cried Mrs. Forest bitterly.

"Señoras, I pray for you, come into ze house at once!" spoke up the Señora again, turning entreatingly to the ladies. "I you promess, zat wen you an orange an' cup of coffee 'ave 'ad, you will yourselves better feel."

"The Señora's right," broke in the Captain. "Come into the house and when you've —" but his sentence was cut short by the sharp report of a pistol, followed in quick succession by two other shots, and a moment later a man, breathless and without coat or hat, and his shirt and trousers in tatters, rushed among them.

"Hide me quick, somebody!" he cried. "For God's sake — the posse —" but before he could finish, a troop of men, armed with six-shooters and Winchester rifles, burst from the cover of bushes that lined the high-road.

"There he is yonder, boys, behind that man!" cried their leader excitedly, a small, thick-set, broad-shouldered man with sandy hair and beard and florid complexion. The others, following the direction indicated by him, seized the fugitive who had taken refuge behind Captain Forest and dragged him hurriedly beneath one of the cottonwood trees, over a lower branch of which they flung a rope. Their work was so expeditious that, before the spectators could realize what was happening, they had bound his hands behind his back and fastened one end of the rope about his neck.

"Stand clear, everybody!" commanded the leader, his gaze sweeping the throng. Then turning to his

men, he said: "When I give the word, boys, let him swing!"

"Don't, boys — don't!" cried the prisoner in a despairing, supplicating voice, dropping on his knees. "For God's sake — give me a chance —" but a jerk of the rope cut short his words which ended in an inarticulate gurgle in his throat.

"They are going to hang him — it's murder!" gasped Mrs. Forest, clinging to her trembling, terrified maid who was already on the verge of fainting.

"Gentlemen," said the Colonel, stepping forward, "I object to such an unheard-of proceeding! You have no right to hang a man without a trial."

"Say, old punk," cried the leader, turning savagely on the Colonel, "who's a runnin' this show?" The well-delivered blow of a sledge-hammer could not have been more crushing in its effect on the Colonel than were the words of the leader; he was completely silenced. Greatly to his credit, however, he stood his ground. He was no coward, for he had faced death and been wounded more than once in his younger days on the field of battle, and had he possessed a weapon at the moment, he would have snuffed out the leader's life as deliberately as he would have blown out the light of a candle, regardless of consequences. But recognizing the carrion with which he had to deal, and the futility of further interference, he quietly shrugged his shoulders, smiled and pulled the end of his mustache. The hanging might proceed so far as he was concerned.

"Gentlemen," spoke up the Captain, "what has this man done?"

"You'll learn that when we're through with him!" replied the leader.

Even were there no doubt of the prisoner's guilt and hanging a well-deserved punishment, Captain Forest, nevertheless, liked fair play. The blood surged to his face. His fighting instincts and spirit of resentment were thoroughly aroused. He had seen men hanged and shot down before in the most summary manner, some of them afterward proving to have been victims of gross error and brute passion. He also knew how futile it was to argue with men whose passions were roused to the fighting pitch. The Colonel's interference was an instance of how little such men could be influenced. It was absurd to look for moderation under the circumstances. There was only one way to save the prisoner — the use of the same means employed by the lynchers, namely, force. Whence could such interference come? How could a man single-handed cope with a well-armed body of men of their type? Only a miracle could save the prisoner and the intervention of a miracle is always a slender prop upon which to lean.

"Now, boys," continued the leader, turning to his men, "get ready —" but his voice was drowned by a chorus of cries and screams from the women.

"Silence!" he roared. "Stop that damn noise!"

"I would like to know, sir, who gave you authority to shut our mouths?" and Blanch Lennox planted herself squarely before him. So astonished was he by her sudden appearance and outburst, that he fell back a pace. He seemed to have lost his voice, and only after much hemming and hawing, managed to stammer an

awkward apology while vainly endeavoring to conceal his embarrassment.

"Ladies," he finally began, removing his hat in an attempt at politeness, "I'm powerful sorry to be obliged to perform this painful duty contrary to your wishes, but the law must be obeyed. We've been a chasin' this feller, who's the most notorious scoundrel in the country, through the mountains for the last three weeks, and now we've got him, I reckon we ain't a goin' ter let him get away. Is we, boys?" and he turned confidently to his men.

"You bet we ain't!" they responded.

"No, ladies," echoed their leader in turn, "not if we know it. Besides, we've got permission from the Mexican authorities to do with him as we like. I guess," he added, "they'll be about as glad to be rid of him as we are. And now, ladies," he continued, "if you don't want to witness as pretty a hanging as ever took place in these parts, you'll take my advice and retire into the house as soon as possible."

But no one stirred. The tall handsome woman still stood before him unmoved, and he was beginning to realize that her gaze was becoming more difficult to meet. Somewhat disconcerted, he began again in his most persuasive tone.

"Ladies, please don't interrupt the course of the law by staying around here any longer than's necessary — for hang he will!" he added.

Still no one showed the slightest sign of complying with his wishes. The situation was becoming intolerable.

"Ladies," he began again, and this time rather peremptorily, "you'll greatly oblige us by retiring at once."

"We'll not move a step until you take the rope from that man's neck," said Blanch firmly and unabashed, still holding her ground. Her words acted like a challenge. His temper was thoroughly roused, it being a question whether he or a lot of women should have their way. He, Jim Blake, overpowered by a mob of sentimental, hysterical women — not while he lived!

"Then, ladies," he answered curtly, placing his hat firmly on his head, "if you won't go into the house, you'll have to see him swing, that's all!" and quickly detailing half his men who lined up before the spectators with cocked rifles, he shouted to the others behind them holding the rope: "Boys, when I count three, do your work!" There was no mistaking his words. The prisoner uttered a half-articulate groan.

"One —" slowly counted Blake.

The Mexicans crossed themselves and began to mutter prayers. Women screamed.

"Two — three —" but simultaneously with the word three, was heard the report of a pistol, and the men pulling on the rope rolled on the ground, a hopelessly entangled mass of arms and legs. The rope had been severed just above the prisoner's head, and when the smothered oaths of the men mingled with the screams of the women had subsided, Dick Yankton with pistol in hand was seen leaning out over the veranda rail.

"I reckon there won't be any hanging at the old

Posada this morning, Jim Blake," he said, calmly covering the latter with his weapon.

"Well, darn my skin!" gasped Blake. "Where did you come from?"

"Oh, I just dropped around," replied Dick, unconcernedly.

"Now, gentlemen," he continued, addressing the men, "I've got the drop on Blake, and if any one of you moves hand or foot I'll send him to a warmer place than this in pretty quick time."

"Don't mind me, boys — turn loose on him!" cried Blake pluckily, but nobody seemed inclined to obey.

"It won't do, Jim," spoke up one of his men. "We ain't a going to see you killed before our eyes. Besides, it's Dick Yankton."

"Jack!" called out Dick, "free the prisoner and be quick about it!"

"You're interfering with the law!" roared Blake, as the Captain proceeded to obey Dick's command.

"I know it," replied Dick; "it isn't the first time I've interfered with it either. Besides, I don't see why I haven't got as good a right to it as you or any other man." Blake sputtered and squirmed helplessly as he faced Dick's weapon, not daring to lift a hand.

"What objection have you got to our ridding the earth of this damned scoundrel, I'd like to know?" he asked, choking with rage.

"Oh, as to that, I've got several, Jim Blake, and one of them is — I don't like to see a man hanged before breakfast. It sort of takes away one's appetite, you

know," he added, coolly eyeing his adversary over the barrel of his pistol.

"Well, if you ain't the most impudent cuss I ever seen!" cried Blake, by this time almost on the point of exploding.

"Perhaps I am," answered Dick, the faintest smile playing about the corners of his mouth. "You're putting up a pretty big bluff, Jim, but I happen to be holding the cards in this game and I rather think you'll stay and see it out.

"Bob Carlton," he continued, addressing the prisoner whom the Captain had freed, "there's a black horse in the corral back of the house; jump on him just as he is and make tracks out of here as almighty fast as you know how!"

"Thank you, Dick, I'll not forget you!" cried Carlton, starting in the direction of the corral but, catching sight of Miss Van Ashton, he stopped short. "I — I beg your pardon, Madame," he stammered, "but would you mind telling me your name?"

"I can't see what business that is of yours!" replied Bessie curtly and with a toss of the head, turning her back upon him.

"I meant no offense, Madame — I —"

"Van Ashton's her name," said the Captain.

"Van Ashton!" he exclaimed.

"You had better be moving, Carlton — you damn fool!" came Dick's angry voice. "The next time you're in for a funeral I may not be around to stop it!"

Carlton needed no further urging. The sound of a

horse going at full speed was presently heard on the road beyond the *Posada*.

"Don't any one move," said Dick quietly, as all listened in silence to the sounds which grew fainter and fainter until they ceased altogether in the distance.

"He's got a good mile start by this time," said Dick at length, coolly lowering his pistol and returning it to his pocket. "Gentlemen," he continued, leisurely descending the veranda, "you're at liberty to follow him if you like."

"After him, boys!" yelled Blake, suddenly aroused to fresh action.

"It's no use, Jim," said one of his men, "our hosses is cleaned blowed."

"Damnation!" growled Blake, tugging nervously at his beard. "And now, Dick Yankton," he continued, confronting him squarely with both feet spread wide apart and his hands thrust to his elbows in his trouser pockets, "the question is, what's to be done with you? I just guess we'll make an example of you for interfering with the law."

"And I guess you won't do anything of the kind, Jim Blake, because there isn't a white man in the country that will help you do it."

"The devil!" ejaculated Blake, completely taken aback by Dick's coolness.

"I guess Dick's about right there, Jim," spoke up another of his men.

Blake was about to continue the argument, but realizing that the sentiment of his men was not with him and that his position was growing momentarily more

ridiculous, he ceased abruptly. Rough though he was and of the swash-buckler type, he was neither insensible to the humor of the situation nor to the nerve it had taken on Dick's part to hold twenty armed men at bay single-handed. It is usually a difficult matter to pocket one's pride, especially if one sees ridicule lurking just around the corner, but few men were capable of resisting the charm of Dick's personality for long.

"Come, Jim, be reasonable," he said, laying his hand familiarly on Blake's shoulder; "Bob Carlton saved my life once and now we're quits."

"He did? Well, that's the only good thing the sneakin' skunk ever done! Why didn't you tell us that before?"

"Because you didn't give me time. You would have hung him first and then listened to what I had to say afterwards."

"Hum!" ejaculated Blake, "I guess you're about right there."

"Boys," continued Dick, turning to the others, "I'm mighty sorry to have spoiled your fun, but I'll see that you don't regret your visit to Santa Fé. Come into the house and I'll tell how it happened. The cigars and the drinks are on me!"

"Well, as I said before, Dick," exclaimed Blake, "you're the cussedest, most contrariest feller I ever seen. You got the best of us this time, but I guess we'll about get even with you on the drinks before we're through — won't we, boys?" and amid a chorus of laughter and good-humored exclamations, the men, followed by Dick and Blake, crowded into the house.

"What a country!" gasped Mrs. Forest after the last of them had disappeared. "Have people here nothing to do but murder one another?" she asked in a despairing voice, sniffing vigorously at the bottle of salts her maid handed her.

"Ze Saints be praised, zey do not!" cried the Señora who by this time had regained her composure. "Such a zing 'as happened nevair before."

"They are a little more free-handed out here than we are," remarked the Captain. "Where we come from, people allow a man to go free after exhausting all the resources of the law, while here, they quietly hang a scoundrel when they catch him without making any fuss about it. It's much simpler, you know."

"Beautiful!" echoed the Colonel.

VIII

AFTER much persuasion and further caustic remarks on the country and a people whose chief occupation seemed to be that of shooting and hanging one another, Mrs. Forest was finally induced to enter the house, leaving Blanch and Bessie seated on the bench beneath the cottonwood tree where they had collapsed, the result of the shock their nerves had sustained.

Their presence seemed as incongruous with their surroundings as that of some delicate hot-house flower blooming in the midst of the desert.

"Could you have believed it if you hadn't seen it?" asked Bessie, the first to break the silence. "Is it all real, or are we still dreaming? I wish somebody would pinch me, my wits are so scattered," and she passed her hand across her eyes as though to dispel some dreadful nightmare.

"I never imagined," replied her companion in a vague uncertain tone of voice, like one laboring under the influence of a narcotic, "that such people existed anywhere outside of books, and yet the samples to which we have just been introduced make characters of fiction look tame in comparison. Oh, dear!" she burst forth, "who could have imagined it?"

"What a transition — I can't understand it!" said

Bessie. "I feel like one who has just dropped from the sky to earth."

"No wonder! I, too, am still seeing stars. Jack certainly must be mad, else how could he have ever picked out such a forsaken land whose inhabitants seem to consist chiefly of ruffians and black women?"

"It's simply incomprehensible after all he's seen of the world," replied Bessie. "Did you notice how he enjoyed our discomfiture? How it was all he could do to keep from laughing in our faces?"

"The brute!" cried Blanch.

"If we had only realized to what we were coming —" Bessie began.

"Oh, it's too late to say that!" interrupted Blanch. "Now that I'm here, I'm not going to turn back; I'm going to see this thing through. And what's more," she added with unmistakable emphasis, "I'm going to see that woman! Have you noticed any one that looks like her?" she asked cautiously, lowering her voice and looking about suspiciously, as she rose from her seat.

"Pshaw!" laughed Bessie, also rising and shaking the dust from her skirt. "You've scarcely talked of anything else since we left home. Why, I really believe you are beginning to be jealous of this creature of your imagination. It's too absurd to suppose that Jack —"

"Is it any more impossible than the people and things we have just encountered?"

"Nonsense! Jack in love with some half-breed — that dusky beauty in breeches who rides astride, and whom he happened to mention to us? It's preposterous!"

"My dear," resumed Blanch calmly, "don't deceive yourself. My woman's intuition tells me that I'm right. Jack's notion of beginning a new life is all nonsense — there's a deeper reason than that for this change in him. Take my word for it, there's a woman at the bottom of it for what possible attraction could this horrid country and its people have for a civilized being?"

"I can't believe it," answered Bessie; "you know how fastidious Jack is. Besides it was only a fleeting glance that he caught of the woman he mentioned — and that in the twilight."

"A glance is quite enough for a fool to fall in love with a phantom," retorted Blanch warmly, thrusting the ground vigorously with the point of her sunshade.

"They say," she went on, "that these dark beauties of the South possess a peculiar fascination of their own — that they have a way of captivating men before they realize what's happening. They sort of hypnotize them, you know."

"But not a man of Jack's type!"

"Oh, I don't mean to infer that she's beautiful," continued Blanch. "Attractive she may be, but how could anything so common be really beautiful? It's not that which worries me — it's the state of his mind. He has evidently reached a crisis. As long as I can keep him in sight he's safe, but should he be left here alone with one of these women in his present frame of mind, there's no knowing what might happen. Any woman if fairly attractive and a schemer, can marry almost any man she has a mind to. You know," she added, "he's not given to talking without a purpose and

usually acts even though he lives to repent of it afterwards. Why, if he were left here, he might marry from ennui, who knows? One hears of such things."

"Heavens!" ejaculated Bessie, "it makes one shudder to think of it! Hush!" she added, nodding in the direction of the house where the Captain appeared in the doorway and halted, regarding them with a mixed expression of curiosity and amusement.

"Well," he said at length, descending to where they stood, "how do first impressions of the place strike you? It's not so dull, after all, is it?" he added, concealing his mirth with difficulty.

"It's charming," replied Blanch in her richest vein of sarcasm, addressing him for the first time since her arrival. "What delightful surroundings, and what congenial people one meets here!"

The Captain burst into an uproarious fit of laughter. The sight of Blanch had sent a sudden thrill through him that told him plainly enough how deeply rooted had been his love and that he had not yet succeeded in eradicating it entirely from his heart as he had supposed.

The spark of the old love still smoldered within him, and would she succeed again in fanning it into flame? He had not forgotten, however, that he had suffered, and her presence acted like some wonderful balm to his wounded soul. It was his turn now and he could afford to humor her. Though there was nothing triumphant in his manner, he, nevertheless, enjoyed that sneaking feeling of satisfaction which most of us experience on beholding the discomfiture of those who have treated us lightly. Moreover, he thoroughly realized what the

coming of Blanch and his family meant. They had come to laugh at him and his surroundings — to ridicule his ideas. The great harlot world had come to pooh-pooh — to scoff and laugh him out of his convictions, and no one knew better than he did what the mighty power and influence of the great civilized guffaw meant. For had he not, during his diplomatic career, seen the primitive man laughed out of his cool, naked blessedness into a modern, cheap pair of sweltering pantaloons? But things were now equal, and this promised to be the most exciting diplomatic game in which he had yet engaged. The defeat of Spain and the annexation of the Philippines were trifles in comparison. And he decided then and there to make the most of it — that come what might, all who entered this game would pay the price to the last farthing. Time and circumstances would prove who was right — they or he.

"Do you know," he said at length, "I don't pity you a bit; it serves you right for coming."

"Pity?" retorted Bessie. "Do we look like a pair of beggars that have come two thousand miles to crave pity at the feet of the high and mighty Captain Forest? Your condescension, Cousin, is insufferable," she added.

"I was just thinking," he resumed, thoroughly enjoying his cousin's wrath, "that you had better drop your silly affectations and spoiled ways while here."

"Really!" burst out Bessie again, her face flushing with growing indignation.

"I do," he returned placidly, "for somehow, the people about here don't seem to appreciate such things."

"I can readily believe it," answered Blanch with a contemptuous laugh and hauteur of manner that were almost insulting. "I don't wonder you feel uneasy on our account considering that we have never enjoyed the advantages their social standards offer. We trust, however, for the sake of old friendship, that you will overlook our shortcomings. A lesson in manners might not be lost on us," she added with a withering glance and tone that would have reduced any other man to a sere and yellow leaf.

She paused, her delicately gloved hand resting lightly on the handle of her sunshade on which she leaned, throwing the graceful outline of her tall slender figure into clear relief against the green background of trees and shrubs. A strange light came into her beautiful blue eyes, softening the expression of her face; a face that had been the hope and despair of many a man; a face that was not alone beautiful but alive and interesting; a face into which all men longed to gaze and once seen could never be forgotten.

Only one man had ever resisted the power and fascination of that face; the man whom she had flung from her in an ungovernable fit of passion; the man whom she either had come to claim as her own again, or to humiliate as he had humiliated her. Who could guess the real motive that prompted her to humble her pride so far as to follow him? Was it love or hatred? Who could say? Her delicate, coral lips curled with just the suggestion of a sneer as she raised her eyes to his again and said in a tone of contempt: "So this is the place where your wild woman lives —" but the words

died on her lips. Her head came up with a jerk and her figure suddenly straightened and stiffened as her gaze became riveted on the face of Chiquita who stood just opposite on the veranda lightly poised with one foot on the steps.

It would have been interesting to have read the thoughts of these two women as they stood silently confronting one another, each taking the measure of the other.

The contrast between the two could not have been more striking. The soft, delicate, well-groomed figure of Blanch, the accomplished woman of the world, with eyes intoxicating as wine and a glowing wealth of golden hair, tempting and alluring as the luxuriance of old Rome at the height of her triumphs before her decadence set in — the last fair breath of her ancient glory — the best and fairest that modern civilization had produced. She had no need of the artificial head-gear and upholstery with which the modern society belle is wont to bolster up herself. There was not the slightest trace of rouge on her lips or cheeks. She had learned that simple food, fresh air and sleep and exercise were the only preservatives for the form and complexion. Spoiled though she was, she was genuine to the core.

On the other hand, what the symmetrical well-rounded lines of Chiquita's figure lost by the unfair comparison of her worn and faded dress with that of the latest Parisian creation, was more than compensated for by the heavy luxuriant masses of blue-black hair, straight nose, large, dark piercing eyes that shone from beneath delicately penciled, broad arching brows, and the mys-

terious hawk-like wildness of her gaze and appearance and general air of strength and power, baffling and inscrutable as the origin of her race; a face and figure which exemplified the perfect type of a race that carried one back to the forgotten days of ancient Egypt and India.

Truly, twice blessed or cursed by the gods was he to be loved by two such women; the one fashion's, the other nature's child.

The look of embarrassment on Captain Forest's face, together with the ludicrousness of the situation, caused Bessie to burst into a sudden fit of laughter into which Blanch, in spite of herself, was irresistibly drawn. Fortunately for the Captain, he did not entirely lose his presence of mind as one is apt to do who unexpectedly finds himself between two tigers about to spring. He did the only sensible thing a man could do under the circumstances. He retired precipitately, leaving the field to whomsoever wished it most.

"The Señoritas laugh," said Chiquita at length, the first to speak. There was a strange light in her eyes as she slowly descended the veranda and came toward them. The sound of her full, rich, musical voice, colored with a soft accent that was pleasing to the ear, instantly brought Blanch and Bessie to themselves.

"Perhaps," she began again calmly, "it is because I am poor?"

"Oh, no, Señorita, how could you imagine —" exclaimed Blanch, recovering her breath.

"Then perhaps it is because I am an Indian and red, not white like yourselves?"

"Are you an Indian, Señorita?" asked Blanch. "I thought you were a Mexican."

"And if I were, I would not be ashamed of it!"

"What a strange creature!" thought Bessie.

"But why did the Señoritas laugh when they saw me?" persisted Chiquita, her expression softening a bit, a faint smile illumining her face.

"Believe me, Señorita," replied Blanch, "we were not laughing at you at all. We were laughing at Captain Forest."

"Ah, the Señor!" ejaculated Chiquita.

"Yes," continued Blanch, "we had already heard of you through Captain Forest, and — I —" she hesitated, "I really can't explain because you wouldn't understand, you know."

"But I do understand, Señorita," answered Chiquita quietly. "You do not deceive me, and since you refuse to tell me why you laughed, I shall be obliged to tell you. I think I can guess the truth."

"Really, I'm curious!" and Blanch smiled compassionately.

"Ah, you think I can't read your face," and Chiquita smiled in turn. "Señorita," she continued with sudden emphasis, "you love the Señor!" Blanch started, the attack was so sudden, her face coloring in spite of her endeavor to conceal her confusion.

"Yes, Señorita, you love him."

"How do you know I love him?" laughed Blanch lightly in turn, by this time thoroughly mistress of herself. "Why, you have only met me for the first time!"

"How do I know? Because I am a woman. I saw

you as you spoke to him. Your whole manner betrayed you — your voice, your eyes. Yes, Señorita," she added with growing passion, fixing her dark piercing eyes on those of Blanch, "you laughed because a poor girl like me of a different race and color, a race despised by you white people, should have imagined that Captain Forest might possibly cast his eyes upon her —"

"Señorita!" cried Blanch protestingly.

"It is the truth," continued Chiquita passionately, "and what is more, I will tell you frankly that I — I, too, love the Señor!"

"I thought so!" exclaimed Blanch.

"Yes, I love him — love him as you do — love him as you can never love him, Señorita!"

"What makes you think so?" asked Blanch, endeavoring to stifle the emotion Chiquita's passionate words aroused within her.

"I know it," she answered quietly; "something tells me so. And should he not love me as I love him, my life will go out of me swiftly and silently like the waters of the streams in summer when the rains cease; my soul will become barren and parched like the desert, and I shall wither and die."

"Die?" echoed Blanch. "Nobody dies of love nowadays, Señorita," and she laughed lightly.

"Perhaps not among your people, but with Indians it is different. When we love it is terrible — our passion becomes our life, our whole existence! Such a confession sounds absurd perhaps, but you assumed an air of superiority — racial superiority, I mean — a thing which I know to be as false as it is presumptuous. I

might assume the airs and attitude of one of your race if I chose, but you laughed, and the race-pride in me cries out that I should be to you what I really am — an Indian, not that which I have learned and borrowed from the white race."

"How extraordinary!" thought Blanch. Surely such passion was short lived and a weak admission on the part of her rival. She was a true character of melodrama — one which she had seen a hundred times on the stage. The battle was hers already — she would win. She heaved a sigh of relief, and drawing herself up to her full height, assumed an attitude of ease, an air of patronage and condescension that only Blanch Lennox could adopt. She could afford to be generous to a child, treat with lenience this clever *ingenue* who in this age could die, or at least imagine herself dying of love.

"Perhaps," resumed Chiquita, with an air of naïveté that seemed perfectly natural to her, "you women do not love as passionately as your darker sisters?"

"Oh, I don't know about that, Señorita," answered Blanch with warmth. "At any rate, you in all probability will have an opportunity to judge that for yourself."

Chiquita gave a little laugh, then said: "Señorita, you love Captain Forest and so do I. Let it, therefore, be a fair fight between us, and in order that you may know you can trust me, I give you this," and drawing a small silver-mounted dagger from out her hair, she handed it to Blanch who took it wonderingly.

"It is often safer," she added, "for a man to go unarmed in this land than for a woman. But as I said, I shall henceforth be to you what I am — an Indian.

It is what a woman of my people would do were she to meet you in my country under similar circumstances; what I would have done had I met you before I came here. The knife signifies that, with it goes the sharp edge of my tongue — that I shall take no unfair advantage of you."

Blanch toyed musingly with the pretty two-edged knife, admiring its richly carved silver handle. Surely she was right after all. Chiquita was a true child of the South whose passions subsided as quickly as they burst into flame. And as for the knife, it would make an excellent paper-cutter.

"Oh, dear, this is too absurd!" she exclaimed. And no longer able to control herself, she burst into a peal of laughter in which was easily detected the scorn, good humor and pity she felt for her would-be rival.

Perhaps Chiquita was as much puzzled by Blanch's behavior as the latter was by hers, for all the while Blanch laughed, she also regarded her with an expression of mingled curiosity and amusement.

"Señorita," said Blanch at length, heaving a sigh, "who are you?"

The latter did not reply immediately. Her face took on an earnest expression and for some moments she stood silent, gazing straight out before her as though oblivious to her surroundings. Then, suddenly recollecting herself, she said:

"I am a Tewana, and am called the Chiquita. My father was the Whirlwind, the War Chief of my people."

"The Whirlwind?" echoed Blanch. "What an appropriate name for a savage!"

"Ah, but you should have seen him! He was the tallest man of the tribe."

"Do you know," said Blanch musingly, "I fancy you must be something like him, Señorita."

"In spirit perhaps, but only a little," she answered. "I often wish that I were more like him, for although he was a child in many things, he was a man nevertheless — civilization had not spoilt him."

Again that dreamy, far-away look came into her eyes and again she seemed to forget for the moment the presence of the two girls as her thoughts reverted to the past.

"Señorita," she said at last, "when one like me stands on the threshold midway between savagery and civilization and compares the crudities and at times barbarities of the one with the luxuries and vices of the other, he often asks himself which is preferable, civilization and its few virtues, or the simple life of the savage. Which, I ask, is the greater — the man who tells the time by the sun and the stars or he who gauges it with the watch? I have listened to your music and gazed upon your art and read your books, but what harmonies compare to nature's — what book contains her truths and hidden mysteries? When I came here I was taught to revere your civilization and I did for a time until the disillusionment came, when I was introduced to the great world of men and discovered how shallow and inadequate it was. Your mechanical devices are wonderful, but as regards your philosophies, the least said of them the better. Spiritually, you stand just where you began centuries ago, and I found that I should be obliged to

deny the existence of God if I continued to revere your institutions.

"Believe me, Señorita, for I speak as one who knows both worlds intimately, nature's and man's, that the great symphony of nature, the throb of our Mother Earth, the song of the forest, the voices of the winds and the waters, the mountains and plains, and the glory of the stars and the daily life of man in the fields, are grander by far, and more satisfying and enduring than all the foolish fancies and artificial harmonies ever created by civilized man."

Her words struck home. For the first time Blanch became thoroughly alive to the danger of the situation. This passionate child of the South had changed suddenly to a mature woman, and a chill seized Blanch's heart as she began to realize her depth and power. Again she was all at sea, and in a vain effort to say something, she stammered:

"Señorita, you are certainly the strangest person I ever met!"

"Not strange, only different," laughed Chiquita, throwing back her head and meeting Blanch's full gaze. "Señorita," she continued, "you are beautiful — more beautiful than any woman I have ever beheld. My heart stands still with fear and admiration when I look at you, for men are often foolish enough to love the beautiful women best. I fear this is going to be a bitter struggle, but let us bear one another no malice in order that we may both know that she who triumphs is the better woman." Frank though her words were, they caused

Blanch to wince, while a flood of passion which she could ill conceal dyed her cheeks a deep crimson.

"Life's usually as tragic as it is comic," laughed Chiquita lightly, slowly moving in the direction of the high-road. "It's strange, isn't it," she exclaimed, pausing and looking back, "that a queen and a beggar should dispute the affections of the same man? Such things occur in the fairy-tales one reads in the books in the old Mission, but seldom in real life," and she was gone.

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IX

CONSIDERING an all-night ride over a rough road in a lumbering old Spanish stagecoach, and the thrilling, harrowing events that succeeded their arrival at the *Posada*, it is little wonder that Mrs. Forest took to her bed early in the day on the verge of a nervous collapse, or that Colonel Van Ashton, contrary to his habit, retired early in the evening firmly convinced that his nephew was suffering from an acute attack of lunacy which took the form of a mania for everything that was wild and bizarre; everything in fact that was contrary to the Colonel's views of life.

How unfortunate that his nephew had not shown signs of madness earlier! It would have been so easy with the assistance of the family physician and lawyer to have confined him in a private sanitarium. And the Colonel fondly pictured his nephew wandering distractedly through a long suite of padded cells — but, alas! the bird had flown. Such things were always expedited with such felicitous despatch in those parts of the earth inhabited by civilized men, but here where everybody was equally mad, where chaos reigned, and nobody either recognized or respected beings of a superior order, what could be done to check the headlong career of his nephew who with twenty millions was rushing straight to destruction?

No wonder God had long since abandoned this land to his majesty, the devil who, as in the days of Scripture, roamed and roared at will. No one having passed twenty-four hours in the country could possibly doubt that his cup of joy was running over. Where his nephew had concealed his fortune was also a source of mystery to him. He certainly had displayed the diabolical cunning that is characteristic of the mentally deranged. Possibly he had concealed it in Mexico, but to combat the institutions of that land was like attempting to stem the tides.

The thought of those twenty millions tortured the Colonel's mind almost beyond endurance, and he groaned aloud as his imagination pictured them rolling in a bright, glittering stream of gold and silver coins into the gutter for the swine that waited to devour them.

Such were the Colonel's reflections as he sat on the edge of his bed in his shirt sleeves and wearily removed his tight fitting, dust-begrimed, patent-leather shoes with the assistance of his valet.

How his feet and back ached! He wanted sympathy, but got none, the others being too much occupied with their own woes to think of his comfort. On the walls of the room were hung numerous cheap biblical prints — the very things he abominated most. Among them, just over the foot of the bed, on the very spot where first his gaze would alight on opening his eyes in the morning, hung a small colored print of the Madonna. No wonder the people of this land spent so much time crossing themselves and calling upon her for protection — they certainly had cause to. The room, in his opin-

ion, was a veritable rat-hole; the place little better than what one might expect to find in a suburb of hell.

The exertions of the last two days had been more than mortal could endure. Never had he felt so completely fagged, and it was with no little concern that he contemplated the reflection of his face in the small oval mirror which hung on the rough gray plaster wall opposite, just over the small, cheap, brown-stained wooden bureau. The sight of his countenance, as is the case with most of us who have not yet entered the limbo of senile decrepitude and still dare look ourselves in the face, was always a source of extreme satisfaction to him. He held it in the highest esteem as though it were the head of some beautiful antique Apollo, and in his, the Colonel's estimation, was the handsomest face on earth.

Indeed it was a handsome face, and like many others both in and outside of his particular set, he devoted hours to its preservation.

What was John, his valet, for? To press his clothes and run errands? Not at all. He was there to massage that precious face and drive away all harassing signs of care and age by means of a liberal use of cold cream and enamel. In the present instance, barring a sunscorched nose, his delicately rouged cheeks like his exquisitely manicured finger tips blushed with rose of vermilion like those of the daughters of Judea of old, contrasting favorably with his dark eyes, wavy white hair, and mustache and eyebrows dyed a jet black. His regular features, long slender white hands, and tall erect figure betokened the born aristocrat of the spoiled, luxurious type.

In spite of his determination not to sleep a wink, this overindulged child and arch hypocrite, fell asleep almost the instant his tired head touched the pillow, and would have slept to a comparatively late hour had it not been for the ceaseless crowing of a cock in the barnyard, awakening him at daybreak.

What a land, where people were not even permitted to sleep! Vague apprehensions for the future went flitting through his mind, and, as he lay in bed moodily contemplating through the window the first sunrise he had witnessed in years, he cursed fate and his nephew, and secretly vowed that he would wring that infernal bird's neck at the first opportunity.

Mrs. Forest's mental attitude resembled that of her brother's, but with Blanch and Bessie it was different. The strangeness and novelty of the situation so different from anything they had hitherto experienced, began to interest them in spite of their previous determination to be bored. That evening they had visited the plaza with the Captain and Dick Yankton and had witnessed the dances beneath the great *alamos* or poplar trees that surrounded the square, braving the risk of contamination which Mrs. Forest had vainly protested would be sure to ensue should they mingle with the populace — the Mexican-Indian rabble of which it was composed — a distinction which only she and the Colonel seemed able to divine, for had it been a garlic-tainted Egyptian or Neapolitan mob, little objection would have been raised to their going. The sights amused and interested them, and after an hour's mild dissipation, they returned to the *Posada* in time to meet a few of the

Señora's guests in the garden, among whom was Padre Antonio. The quaint, inborn courtesy of the well-bred Spaniard was a revelation to them; something they imagined did not exist outside of Spain.

The charm of the Padre's simple manner and ways proved no less irresistible to them than to the rest of the world, and they marveled that he spoke English so well. His intimate knowledge of the people and the customs of the country threw a new light on them, reconciling the girls to many things that had seemed incomprehensible.

The Señora, out of consideration for the ladies, by whose presence she was greatly honored, had relinquished her rooms to them; the best and most comfortably furnished which the *Posada* afforded.

It was a late hour before the girls retired for the night. There was so much to talk over, and when they did finally lay themselves down to rest, it was with the conviction that Captain Forest was not quite so mad as they had supposed. He was at least a harmless lunatic and in no danger of running amuck.

As for Bessie, the gentle hand of sleep soon closed her eyes, and she slept the sleep of a tired child. With Blanch it was otherwise.

How could she sleep with the face of Chiquita constantly before her and the pangs of jealousy gnawing at her heart? How stupid to have imagined her to be one of those bovine women with large liquid eyes who, figuratively speaking, pass the major portion of their lives standing knee-deep in a pond, gazing stolidly out upon the world; a fat brown wench upon whose hip a

man might confidently expect to hang his hat by the time she has attained the age of forty.

Nothing could have been farther from the mark. She might have known that Jack could not have been caught with so thin a bait. All night long she tossed on her pillow, or silently rose to gaze at the stars from the window.

"Oh, if she only were not so beautiful!" she moaned as the first pale streaks of light in the east told her that day had finally dawned, and she crept stealthily back to bed again. Of course Jack, the wretch, was sleeping peacefully — that was the irony of fate! What did he know of suffering? But he would pay for this!

Their rooms overlooked the *patio*, and from behind an angle of a screen she could look straight across it into the garden beyond as she lay in bed. The bright shafts of the morning sun sifted down through the branches of the trees and lay in patches of gold on the grass and flowers beneath and flooded the *patio* with light. Above the tops of the trees and one corner of the low roof, the clear, pale blue skyline was just visible. Butterflies and humming-birds darted in and out among the fragrant white clematis and honeysuckle and passion vines that hung from the arcades surrounding the court, or hovered over the fountain and basin of gold fish in its center, edged with grasses and ferns. The notes of the golden oriole and cooing of pigeons and wood-doves mingling with the silvery jingle of an occasional *vaquero's* spurs, came from the garden beyond.

How peaceful it was! After all, why was the place

so unusual, so different from the rest of the world? But forget where one was, and the scene might have been one in Algiers or Egypt, or in a town in Spain or Northern Italy. And why, she asked herself, as her thoughts reverted to Chiquita, was this Indian woman so very different from themselves?

Dress her as they were dressed, and place her in the proper surroundings, and she would easily pass for a Gypsy or a Spaniard. Was there any reason to believe that the queens of Sheba and Semiramis with their tawny skins were any less fair than she, Blanch Lennox, with her rosy, soft white complexion? Or Chiquita a shade darker than Cleopatra, the witch of the Nile, whose beauty caused the downfall of Antony and with it the waning power and splendor of ancient Egypt?

Was her lineage superior to Chiquita's, the descendant of a long line of rulers whose ancestry stretched back into the dim, remote past as ancient as the hills, the record of whose lives and deeds stood inscribed on the ruined temples and palaces scattered throughout the land where they once dwelt at a time when her European ancestors roamed the wilderness half naked and clad in the skins of wild beasts?

White men of eminence had married Indians and their descendants were proud of their lineage. True, Chiquita was an exception just as she towered above most women of her race. And who were they, that they should criticize — vaunt their superiority in the face of the universal scheme of things? Were they really any better? The same passions, longings and

aspirations that swayed them, swayed the Red man as well.

Their daily lives were different — their aspirations were directed in different channels, that was all. What was true civilization and culture, any way? Who had ever succeeded in defining them? The so-called civilized world might prattle of culture. Its ideas compared with those of mankind as a whole were purely relative and of a local origin and color, and could not be gauged by a uniform standard of ethics. What pleases the one fails to attract the other. The man in power who talks of culture may be taken seriously by those of his own race who stand by and applaud his words, but remove him from his home surroundings and place him on a footing of equality with those of a different race and environment and his arguments fail to convince.

Did the harangues of Louis the Sixteenth's tormentors convince him of the ethical standards of universal justice, or John Brown's sacrifice the representatives of a slave-holding population?

Which is the most convincing — the example set by the early Spartans, or that of the man who surrounds himself with every luxury and convenience of modern life; the man who reads books and lives in a house and travels by train and automobile, or he who dwells in a tent, who is ignorant of letters, and prefers the slower locomotion of horse and foot? Who is the arbiter of fashion? The sun shines alike on the just and the unjust, the great world still continues to laugh and goes on its way in spite of men's philosophies,

but tear up the map, as the French say, and where are our standards and codes?

Prove it if you can, that the wild flower in the meadow is less beautiful than the one reared beneath the hand of the gardener. Argue and theorize as we will, our sophistries count for little when we are brought face to face with the realities of life. The law of compensation and certainty of facts still hold the balance when the bed-rock of human existence is reached. One might as well expect the mountains to slip into the sea, or the stars to pause in their courses to hearken to the voice of a modern Joshua as a man in love with a vision of beauty, to listen to ethics.

It was quite evident that somebody had lied. In fact, all men of her race had been lying from the beginning of time, for what, after all, did civilization amount to if it were not convincing? Did it ever soothe a wounded heart, stifle the pangs of jealousy, or was it ample compensation for the loss of the great prize of life — happiness?

Civilization and blindness were fast becoming synonymous terms, and there were even moments when one almost fancied one heard the laughter of the gods. Let the dull brute civilized herd sweep by, all its moralizing and sophistries could not arouse so much as a single heart-beat where sentiment was concerned.

The truth of these convictions surged in upon her with overwhelming force. Had Jack also noted them, she asked herself.

Possibly, but not, perhaps, with the keener intuition of the woman. She breathed hard. Hot tears of

rage, jealousy and disappointment surged to her eyes. She could endure it no longer — she felt as though she would stifle. Suddenly she sat bolt upright in bed and then sprang to the floor, noticing for the first time the pretty little Mexican girl, Rosita, who at Bessie's summons, had entered and deposited a tray containing oranges, chocolate and *tortillas* on the table in the center of the room.

The dark circles beneath Blanch's eyes and her general appearance of a disheveled Eve told Bessie how little she had slept.

"I knew you were thinking of her," she said, throwing herself back in the pillows and stretching her arms. Her eyelids drooped for a moment over her great violet eyes and she laughed lightly with the contentment of one whose heart is free.

"Of course I am," returned Blanch, coloring and biting her lip. "What else should I be thinking of?"

"Do you know, I rather like her," continued Bessie, raising on one elbow and stretching herself again with the delicious satisfaction of one who has slept soundly and well.

"And I hate her!" cried Blanch. And seizing Chiquita's dagger which lay on the table beside the tray, she plunged it viciously into an orange.

X

THINGS began to assume a more favorable aspect. Even Mrs. Forest had plucked up enough courage to venture beyond the confines of the *Posada's* garden.

Late one afternoon as she with Blanch and Bessie descended the veranda steps, preparatory to a stroll through the town, a horseman, dressed in the height of Mexican fashion, shot suddenly round the curve in the road at full gallop and drew rein before them, tossing the dust raised by his animal's hoofs into their faces.

Dust and a horse's nose thrust suddenly into Mrs. Forest's face could hardly improve a temper already strained to the breaking point.

"Are people beasts — mere cattle of the fields to be trampled upon by a horse?" she gasped, as soon as she had recovered sufficiently from her surprise.

"A thousand pardons — I did not see you!" replied the horseman, his English colored with a slight accent.

"What are people's eyes for?" returned Mrs. Forest, making no attempt to conceal her irritation.

"Mrs. Forest, I see you do not recognize me," answered the horseman, smiling and raising his broad-brimmed *sombrero* which partially concealed his features.

"Don Felipe Ramirez!" cried Blanch and Bessie in

the same breath. "How," exclaimed Blanch, "could you expect us to recognize you in that costume? Why are you masquerading in such a disguise?" Don Felipe laughed as he swung himself lightly from the saddle.

"It's the costume of our people," he answered, shaking them cordially by the hand. "It's the one they prefer, without which one cannot always command their respect. They detest modern innovations and cling to the customs of their ancestors. It's a bit of old Mexico, that's all. But what brings you here?" he asked, changing the topic of conversation. "Did you drop from the clouds? I would as soon have thought of finding oranges growing on the cactus as seeing you here."

"Only a pleasure trip combined with a little exploration on our own account," answered Blanch indifferently. "We hope," she continued, "to emulate the example of the old Spanish *Conquistadores* — some of your ancestors perhaps?"

"Then may your wanderings lead you southward. My *hacienda* lies but twenty miles from here, and from this moment, it is placed at your disposition. Not in the polite terms of the proverbial Spanish etiquette which presents the visitor with everything and yet nothing at all, but actually. Indeed, I shall expect to see you there soon. The life will interest you, I know."

"We certainly shall avail ourselves of the rare privilege, Don Felipe," said Bessie. "Do you intend stopping here?" she asked.

"For a few days, yes. A room is always waiting for me here."

"How delightful!" exclaimed Blanch. "We shall expect to see a great deal of you. In the meantime, we shall visit the town and shall see you this evening. Until then, *á Dios*, as you Spaniards say. You observe, we are making rapid progress in the language," she added, smiling and glancing back at him over her shoulder as they moved away in the direction of the highroad.

"What a strange costume for a man like Don Felipe to wear! It's as gay and extravagant as a woman's!" said Bessie as soon as they were out of hearing.

"It's becoming though," answered Blanch. "This is truly the land of surprises. I wonder what will happen next?"

"What can have brought them here, to this out-of-the-way place?" mused Don Felipe, throwing one arm lightly over the neck of his horse as he leaned gently against the animal.

Don Felipe Ramirez was young and handsome — the handsomest and wealthiest man in all Chihuahua. One who measured his lands not by acres, but by hundreds of square miles, over which roamed vast herds of horses, cattle and sheep, and of which Chiquita might have been mistress had she so chosen. Within this vast domain were situated numerous villages of Mexican and Indian populations, subject in a measure to his command. His word, where it did not conflict with the central Government, was law; but Don Felipe, selfish and unprincipled though he was by nature, was too easy

going ever to think of making unscrupulous use of such power. So long as things went smoothly, he was the last man to exercise his almost unlimited authority for the mere pleasure of dominating others as many men might were they placed in his position.

His leniency in governing, his lavish manner of living, and a way he had of fraternizing with his people on occasions — the latter prompted not from motives of generosity, but purely from those of vanity and a love of popularity — made him fairly popular among his subjects. It was when Don Felipe wanted something in particular that he became dangerous, especially if that something lay within his jurisdiction. Then indeed, was he one to be feared.

His appearance was striking; a swarthy complexion, thick, shiny, black curly hair and mustache, lustrous black eyes and delicate features, and a lithe sinewy body, every movement of which was cat-like and expressive of treachery.

His high-crowned, broad-brimmed *sombrero* of gray felt was richly embroidered with gold and silver. A slender, pale yellow satin tie adorned his soft white, heavily frilled shirt front. His soft gray jacket and leggins of goat skin, also ornamented with gold and silver buttons and embroidery, were slashed at the sleeves below the elbow and knee and interlaced with filmy gold cords from beneath which shone a pale yellow satin facing embroidered with tiny red flowers. A gay scarlet silken *banda* from beneath which peeped the silver hilt of a knife, encircled his slender waist, while his feet were encased in russet tanned boots adorned

with spurs inlaid with gold and silver and which tinkled like fairy bells with every step he took. The trappings of his horse were also heavily inlaid with silver. Theatrical though his costume was, it became him well and harmonized perfectly with his surroundings, completing the picture of a Spanish Don, the representative of a past era. A costume that was only to be seen in the remoter parts of the country — one which was becoming rarer each day.

Four years had elapsed since he had last looked upon the familiar scenes about him. Nothing appeared to have changed during that time as his gaze wandered from the old *Posada* to the garden beyond. He sighed, and a momentary expression of pain and weariness passed across his countenance as he silently surveyed the scene which recalled memories whose bitterness was enough to overwhelm a man of maturer character and years.

In the Indian *pueblo*, La Jara, had lived the beautiful *mestiza* girl, Pepita Delaguerra, with whom he had fallen in love in early youth.

The gentle, confiding nature of Pepita was ill suited to that of the passionate, impulsive Felipe, and proved her undoing. For, when old Don Juan, Felipe's father, heard of his son's infatuation, he immediately packed him off to the City of Mexico with the injunction not to return under a year. An obscure half-caste for a daughter-in-law! Holy Maria! the thought was enough to cause his hair to stand on end. No, the old Don had other plans for his son. Maria Dolores, Felipe's cousin, was the woman he had picked out for his wife,

and marry her he should if he wished to inherit his father's vast estates. In case he disregarded the latter's wish and married Pepita, the estates were to go to the Church, so it was stipulated in Don Juan's will. But neither the Church nor old Don Juan, as it afterwards proved, were a match for the clever Felipe. The handsome scapegrace had already secretly married Pepita.

The strangest of all things is perhaps the irony of fate. Before the year was up during which Felipe was charged to remain in the City of Mexico, both his father, Don Juan, and the priest who had performed the marriage ceremony for Felipe and Pepita, died. During his absence from home, the observant and quick-witted Felipe had learned not only many new things, but had made the acquaintance of other women as well. At its best, the love of the passionate, hot-blooded Felipe and the gentle Pepita could have endured only for a time. The attractions and fascinations of the Capitol opened his eyes to many things which he had hitherto overlooked, especially, that there are many beautiful women in the world, and always one who is just a little more beautiful than the others if one took the trouble to look for her. And so it happened that he forgot not only his honor, but his obligations to Pepita, and destroying the record of their marriage which he managed to secure with the assistance of a confederate, he turned a deaf ear to her pleadings and went his way.

What had he, Don Felipe Ramirez, who lived and ruled like a prince on his vast estates, to fear from a pretty little half-caste Indian girl?

But Don Felipe was young and still had much to learn in the world. The avenging angel that inevitably awaits us all at some turn or other in the lane, stood nearer to him than he realized, and the vengeance which followed was swift and complete.

Pepita took poison and died, but she died not alone — she died in the arms of Chiquita who had but recently returned from the convent.

The latter frequently accompanied Padre Antonio on his charitable missions and thus it chanced that she made Pepita's acquaintance and learned her story. Time passed and all went well with Felipe until the day he chanced to meet Chiquita.

We may deaden our souls to the voice of conscience, disavow a belief in destiny and shut our eyes to those forces of the Invisible which, in spite of ourselves, we know to exist, but how is it, that no man ever succeeds in escaping his fate?

When Don Felipe Ramirez looked for the first time into the two dark lustrous worlds of Chiquita's eyes, he beheld the height and depth of his existence. From that moment he fell at her feet and worshiped her with a passion that consumed and mastered him. Waking and dreaming she was ever in his thoughts — he could not live without her. But not until he was mad, ravished with desire, did she consent to become his wife. A smile, or a gentle pressure of the hand were the only caresses she deigned to bestow upon him; not until they were married would he be permitted to embrace and kiss her, give rein to his passion. A strange attitude for one of her nature to assume, and, as he

looked back upon it, he wondered how he had endured it — that he had not suspected something.

At length the day set for the wedding arrived, and Chiquita with Señora Fernandez drove in state to the old Mission church where Padre Antonio awaited them to perform the marriage ceremony.

Don Felipe, in a state of exultation that lifted his soul to the clouds, stood waiting for her on the steps of the church as had been agreed between them; but as the two advanced, Chiquita suddenly paused before the door, and turning, tore the bridal-veil and wreath of orange blossoms from her brow and flung them into his face, crying: "Pepita Delaguerra is avenged!" Then turning, she deliberately descended the church steps and reëntering her carriage, drove home, leaving Don Felipe dazed and speechless before the crowd of spectators that had gathered to witness the passing of the bride and groom.

Later she confessed the reason for her motives to Padre Antonio, but one circumstance she withheld even from him, the nature of which Don Felipe did not suspect, but which he would have given worlds to know.

Chiquita's conduct became the scandal of the country for miles around, and as is invariably the case, the majority of the women sided with Felipe. In more refined circles of society, her act would have been considered highly reprehensible and Felipe overwhelmed with sympathy. His base ingratitude would have been lightly censured in the familiar, sugared terms of the most approved fashion. He would have been forgiven, and petted, and even lauded as a martyr — and then, the

world would have forgotten. With the Indian woman, however, it was different.

On the altars of her people was still written, "blood for blood," the same as in the ancient days.

Crushed, humiliated, his pride humbled to the dust, Don Felipe left the country and for four years sought to forget his shame and the taunts of his enemies in the distractions of the world. He traveled everywhere, was presented at the different Courts of Europe, and it was in Washington where his uncle was the Mexican Minister to the United States, that he met Blanch and Mrs. Forest and her niece. In vain did he try to forget. In vain did he search for another woman to supplant his love for Chiquita. He plunged into the wildest dissipation, but to no effect. The beautiful face of the dark woman followed him everywhere, stood between him and the world, lured him, fascinated him still as nothing else could, tortured him day and night and he knew no rest.

A thousand times he resolved to return and kill her, and a thousand times he relented, for he loved her as madly as ever and could not carry out his resolve. A prey to alternate fits of remorse and hatred, and tortured constantly by the knowledge of an unrequited love, the soul of Don Felipe Ramirez suffered the torments of the damned. His unconquerable love for Chiquita devoured him, gnawed constantly at his heart, and he cursed her — cursed her as only one of his temperament who had suffered as he suffered, could curse.

What could he do? Anguish succeeded anguish until

he was at length drawn back again as irresistibly as the magnet is drawn to the north, to the woman he both loved and hated. He would throw himself at her feet. He, the proud, arrogant Don Felipe of former years, and bowed in the dust, implore forgiveness. Nothing was too hard. Any sacrifice she might demand of him, he would make. Surely, when she saw his remorse, his contrite humbled spirit, understood his suffering and realized that he could not forget her, could not live without her, that he loved her still through all the years of suffering, that his life was irrevocably linked to hers, she would relent, forgive him — become his wife.

His wife! The thought electrified, elated his being to an extent that it was lifted for the moment from out the black depths of his despondency. If not, well then, there would be time for the fulfillment of that which must inevitably follow — either his death or hers.

XI

"HOLY MOTHER! but I am glad to see you again, Don Felipe Ramirez! What blessed chance has brought you back to us again?" Don Felipe started like one in a dream, and turning in the direction whence came the sound of the voice, he beheld Señora Fernandez standing on the veranda regarding him intently.

"Doña Fernandez!" he exclaimed with genuine pleasure, advancing to meet her, and extending his hand which she eagerly seized and held between both her own.

"*Muchacho — muchacho!*" she cried, clapping her hands as she released her hold on Don Felipe's. "Carlos, the *Caballero's* horse!" she continued, addressing the *vaquero* that appeared in the doorway of the Inn at her summons and who advancing, took possession of Don Felipe's horse and led him away to the stables.

"Let me look at you, Don Felipe," she continued, regarding him closely. "Why, you have not changed a hair! It might have been but yesterday that you left us."

"And you, Doña Fernandez are still the charming, handsome mistress of the *Posada de las Estrellas* to whom all men are irresistibly drawn."

"Flatterer!" retorted Señora, laughing gayly and

blushing like a girl of sixteen. How sweet it was to hear such words from a handsome *Caballero* like Don Felipe! It reminded her of the old days when all men thought her beautiful and went out of their way to tell her so.

"It was unkind of you to remain away so long, Don Felipe. Your friends have missed you sadly and have prayed for the day of your return."

"Friends?" echoed Felipe with a sneer.

"Aye, friends. You will find that you have more friends now than when you left us."

"I can scarcely believe it. And yet," he added, "I wish it might be so."

"You shall learn shortly for yourself," returned Señora.

"How long," interrupted Felipe, eager to change the drift of the conversation, "have the American ladies been here?"

"Ah, you have seen them?"

"Yes, they were just going out for a walk when I arrived. It was a pleasant surprise to see them here. They are friends of mine."

"You know them?"

"Yes. I met them a year ago in Washington."

"*Dios!* to think of it!" she exclaimed.

"But what are they doing here?" he asked.

"Ah! that is just what I would like to know myself," replied Señora. "*Caramba!* but they are grand ladies! They say," she went on, "that they are traveling for pleasure, but what pleasure can such delicate, refined ladies possibly find in the desert, I should like

to know? Judging from their talk and actions they can not have seen very much of the world. *Dios!* you should have witnessed the scene they created the day they arrived. And yet," she continued, "I like them and am glad they are here. They have brought new life into the place. God knows it is no longer what it used to be in the old days when Don Carlos, my husband, was alive," she added with a sigh.

Don Felipe smiled at the Señora's provincialism. What a great world lay outside that of her own, of which she was entirely ignorant.

A trip to the City of Mexico during her honeymoon was the only journey she had ever taken beyond the confines of Chihuahua.

"And then there is Mrs. Forest's brother, Col-on-el Van Ash-ton," she continued, pronouncing the latter's name slowly and with difficulty.

"Holy Maria! but he has caused us trouble! Nothing seems to suit him."

"Colonel Van Ashton?" repeated Felipe. "Ah, yes, I remember him."

"But that is not all," interrupted Señora. "There is also Captain Forest, Mrs. Forest's son. He came here before the others and seemed very much surprised and put out by their unexpected appearance."

"Captain Forest?" repeated Don Felipe slowly, as if trying to recall a chance meeting. "I have never met him. What is he like?"

"Ah, he's a grand Señor," answered Señora with enthusiasm. "A *Caballero* every inch, and rides a horse that's the devil himself. Why, only yesterday

the brute kicked out the side of the corral, and after chasing the men off the place who had been teasing him, calmly walked into the garden and rolled in my choicest flower-bed."

"He must be a thoroughbred at any rate," laughed Felipe.

"Thoroughbred? He's the devil, I say! Captain Forest and his man, José, are the only ones that dare go near him." Don Felipe drew a gold cigarette-case thickly studded with diamonds and rubies from the inner pocket of his jacket, and lighted a cigarette.

"As I was saying," Señora went on, "Captain Forest is a fine gentleman. He's a great friend of Señor Yankton, and —" she stopped abruptly.

"And what?" asked Felipe suspiciously, closely scanning her face as he tossed away the burnt end of the match.

"Oh, nothing," answered Señora evasively. "Only much has transpired during your absence, Don Felipe." She hesitated as though uncertain how to proceed, then said: "I might speak of certain things, but perhaps I had better not. They would not interest you, anyway."

"Ah!" he said at length, endeavoring to conceal the emotion her words aroused. "I — I think I understand. You — you refer to her, I suppose?" There was a slight tremor in his voice and his hand trembled as he raised his cigarette to his lips for a fresh puff.

"Yes," she answered quietly. "I — I was about to say that she appears to be interested in this Captain Forest. But of course, that's nothing to you," she

added hastily, watching him narrowly the while. Her words acted like fire to tinder.

"Interested in him?" he cried, starting violently and letting his cigarette fall to the ground. His face grew ashen pale and his right hand involuntarily went to the knife in his sash. "No, no, it cannot be!" he muttered excitedly. "Are you sure of what you say, Doña Fernandez? Tell me that it is not true — that it is a lie!" he almost hissed, his eyes glowing with the fires of passion and jealousy.

"Why, what has come over you, Don Felipe Ramirez?" cried Señora in alarm. "Surely you cannot — she can be nothing to you any more?"

"Nothing to me? Why do you suppose I am here?" he answered.

"*Madre de Dios!*" muttered Señora.

"Doña Fernandez," he began after a pause, his voice trembling in spite of himself, "God knows I have tried to forget her, but I — I cannot!" and his voice broke.

"What?" cried Señora excitedly. "You don't really mean to say that you still — love her?"

"I do," answered Felipe fiercely, driving his heel furiously into the ground. For some moments neither spoke. Then a flush of anger mounted to Señora's brow and she cried:

"Fie! Don Felipe! Have you forgotten your self-respect? The handsomest, richest man in all Chihuahua running after an Indian — the woman who treated you so shamefully — an ingrate who is unworthy of a love like yours? If I could have had my way, she would

have been whipped publicly! What would Don Juan, your father, peace be to his soul, say if he were alive? Love her!" she cried in a frenzy of hatred and jealousy. "How can you possibly love her, Don Felipe Ramirez?"

"How can I love her?" retorted Felipe fiercely. "Why does the grass grow? Why do the birds sing? Why do the streams run to the ocean? Why do the flowers turn to the sun? Tell me that, Doña Fernandez," he cried in agony and bitterness, "and I will tell you why I love her in spite of myself, in spite of what she did, in spite of every effort I have made to resist her fascination! God!" and he struck his breast with his clenched hand, "I wonder I did not kill her then and there, but I could not, I could not; I loved her so!"

"*Dios*, but this is strange!" gasped Señora, raising both hands for an instant and then crossing herself devoutly as if to avert the power of some evil — the spell which seemed to cling to Don Felipe and bind him as with hoops of steel. She did not realize that Chiquita belonged to that rare type of beings who seem immortal; that it was impossible to imagine her other than young, that the years could work no change within her, and although Felipe had not yet seen her, his soul must flame up at the sight of her as of yore.

Felipe was silent, his eyes cast on the ground. His face wore a malignant expression of pain and hatred, and he trembled in every limb.

The revelation of his anguish startled her. She stepped close up to him and laying her hand gently

on his shoulder, said in a voice full of compassion, almost of pity: "I understand, Don Felipe! You still see her as she was when you last knew her — it is but natural. Of course you could not know, but she has changed since then. In the opinion of every one, she has fallen, degraded herself."

"Degraded herself? What do you mean?" asked Felipe, turning his searching gaze upon her.

"Only a fortnight ago," answered Señora, "on the great day of the *Fiesta*, she danced publicly in Carlos Moreno's theater."

"Chiquita danced in Carlos Moreno's hall? Impossible!"

"Don Felipe," replied Señora with just the suggestion of a smile, "all things are possible with a woman."

"But why did she dance?" he asked.

"I don't know; neither does any one else. They say she received three thousand *pesos* in gold."

"Three thousand *pesos?*" echoed Felipe. "What did she do with them?"

"Ah! that's the mystery! What did she do with them?" answered Señora.

"It was not so much her dancing that scandalized the community, for we all know what a wonderful dancer she is. Nobody ever danced as she does, and we are willing to give her credit for it, but what did she do with the money? That's the scandal of it! I have noticed no change in her dress," she continued, "nor is it known that she has spent a single *peso* as yet."

"Strange," he murmured. "I cannot understand it."

"No more can I nor any one else," answered Señora. "But I have been forgetting my duty; I must prepare a room for you, Don Felipe. In the meantime," she added, ascending the veranda and pausing for an instant, "be assured of the hearty welcome of your friends when they learn of your return."

"Chiquita danced in public? I can't understand it!" he said aloud after Señora Fernandez had disappeared in the house. "And she interested in this Captain Forest?" His face grew livid and then black with hatred as a fresh wave of rage and jealousy swept over him.

"No, no; it cannot be!" he gasped, his left hand resting over his heart as though in pain. For some time he remained motionless as a statue, lost in thought with his eyes fixed on the ground. Suddenly he raised his head with a quick jerk. His face no longer wore an expression of pain and anguish, but one of settled, calm determination.

"I have come just in time," he said quietly. He smiled, and drawing forth his cigarette-case once more, he opened it and lit a fresh cigarette.

XII

DOÑA FERNANDEZ could not sleep. All night long she tossed on her bed, repeating her conversation with Don Felipe and revolving what course to pursue. She instinctively felt that a great tragedy of some kind was imminent. Unless some plan of concerted action were immediately adopted, nothing could prevent it.

She knew her people too well. A reckless, hot-blooded man like Don Felipe in his present mood could not be trusted for long, but must sooner or later provoke a quarrel with Captain Forest, who she knew, would be equally dangerous if aroused. Since her conversation with Felipe she had noted the attitude of Blanch toward the Captain and her woman's instinct had half guessed the truth. But beautiful and irresistible though Blanch appeared, there was Chiquita, more beautiful and attractive than when Felipe had last seen her, and also quite as dangerous.

She knew that Felipe's passion was hopeless — that Chiquita would not hesitate to show her dislike and contempt for him anew — that should Captain Forest be attracted to her also, she would act like a fire-brand between the two men. If only one of them might be persuaded to leave the place, the clash which must inevitably occur, might be averted for a time at least,

but this was clearly impossible. There was only one thing to be done for the present — advise Chiquita of Felipe's return and warn her of the danger that threatened them all if she provoked him unnecessarily.

Hopeless though this plan seemed, Chiquita might for the Captain's sake, if she really cared for him, act more discreetly than was her wont. But what could be expected from a woman in love? Who could tell how she would act? Besides, she argued, all men are fools. They seem to be born only to become the playthings of women, the majority of whom are invariably deceived by them in the end.

How she hated her! To think of Don Felipe running after her, eating out his heart, throwing away his young life for one like her! A love like his going begging! Merciful God! was there no justice in this world? And for the moment, she was quite carried away by a paroxysm of fury.

Ah, if only she, Doña Fernandez, were but ten years younger! But the chosen birds of Venus, the white doves of matrimony, were not destined to hover over her head a second time. Tears of longing and vexation dimmed her eyes as she thought of the golden, halcyon days of youth that would never return. At any rate, Felipe and Chiquita must not meet until after she had warned the latter. Blanch must be used as a foil as long as possible.

And so it happened that, when breakfast was over, Señora adroitly arranged that Felipe should conduct the two girls for a morning's ramble to the pretty little cañon of the river which lay but a mile distant from

the town where the foothills began; a plan that suited Blanch perfectly. She, too, had been doing some thinking over night and had recognized the possibility of using Don Felipe as a foil against Jack; he was certainly handsome and clever enough to serve the purpose admirably.

Captain Forest had gone for a ride an hour before for the purpose of giving his horse a short run to the foothills and back. So, when Señora had seen the others safely off, she slipped quietly away in the direction of Padre Antonio's house.

It lacked a quarter of eleven when she left the house. She knew that Chiquita would have long since returned from the market and would be at home. So occupied was she with her thoughts as she hurried forward intent upon her mission, she did not look up until she turned into the road leading directly past Padre Antonio's gate, when she suddenly stopped short. Before her she beheld Captain Forest standing in front of the gate holding his horse, and Chiquita handing him a red rose. Another instant, and Chiquita vanished through the gate into the garden and Captain Forest, remounting his horse, came riding leisurely down the road at a walk, inhaling the rose with evident pleasure. She drew back into the shadow of the old wall and pressed close into the thick bushy mass of white clematis vine which hung over it from above and waited until he passed.

It is the unexpected that always happens. The meeting between Chiquita and the Captain was purely accidental. While returning from his ride, he had been

"The Picture which she presented was one he carried with him for many a day."

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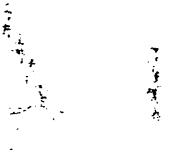

attracted by the beauty and luxuriance of Padre Antonio's garden as he rode by. He wheeled his horse about and drew rein before the open iron grating of the gate in order to obtain a better view of it. Its flowers consisted chiefly of roses of different varieties and colors. The air was spicy with their perfume and, as he inhaled their fragrance in deep breaths, his attention was presently attracted by the figure of Chiquita who appeared in the pathway before him, pausing beside a luxuriant bush of blood-red blossoms and apparently quite unconscious of his presence. The picture which she presented was one he carried with him for many a day afterward.

A small white dove strutted and cooed on the ground before her, while another flew down from the housetop and after circling above her head, also settled down beside its mate in the pathway.

She was dressed in a short pale green skirt and bodice, the latter cut low at the neck before and behind. The sleeves were short, reaching to the elbow and terminating in a narrow frill of deep saffron, their sides open and interlaced with silvery cords. Two richly embroidered silken shawls of a pale red color with long fringe and worn in Spanish style, adorned her dress. The one, pinned at the waist at the back and following the outline of the bodice, passed up over her left shoulder and down in front to her breast where it was fastened with a golden brooch, the end falling in a graceful length of fringe. The other, also fastened at the back of her waist, passed around her right hip and diagonally down across the front of her skirt.

Golden poppies adorned the heavy masses of her lustrous black hair, worn high and held in place by a silver comb. A saffron lace mantilla of the same deep shade as that of the frill on her sleeves, fell in graceful folds from the comb to her shoulders, while her feet were clothed in silk stockings of the same shade and soft brown beaded slippers of undressed leather.

To complete this costume which only a Gypsy or one of Chiquita's tawny complexion would have dared essay to wear, a small pale red silken fan ornamented with gold and silver spangles, hung suspended from her wrist by a satin ribbon of deep orange which flashed in the sunlight like a splash of gold on a humming-bird's throat.

It was not by some happy chance that the Captain found her arrayed in such finery, as is so often the case with heroines of romance, but the result of much premeditation and studied effect. Ever since her meeting with Blanch she had dressed herself daily with terrible deliberation and nicety of precision, the same as every woman of flesh and blood would have done under the circumstances, on the chance of Captain Forest finding her at home when he came to pay his respects to the Padre as he had intimated he would do.

The thought of the innumerable dresses possessed by her rival, and the scantiness of her own wardrobe, composed though it was of the richest laces, silks and satins in the style of a past era, was something appalling; enough to turn a stouter heart than hers. And had she been anything else than an Indian, she would have sat down on the floor of her room in the midst

of her finery and wept copious and bitter tears like the daughters of Babylon of old. The thought of the old dress which she had worn on the day of their meeting was not alone mortifying — it was excruciating. One of those things which we hasten to forget.

Dios! how she must have looked to him in the regal presence of Blanch, gowned in her stylish traveling costume!

Don Felipe Ramirez would have kissed the dust from off the hem of such an old garment, but would Captain Forest do the same? She could not afford to take any more risks with a rival like Blanch in the field.

There is no knowing how long Captain Forest would have remained a silent spectator of the charming picture she presented, had not her attention been attracted by the sound of Starlight's hoofs as he began to paw the ground impatiently. She raised her head from the bush over which she was bending and turned her gaze in the direction of the gate.

"Oh!" she cried with a little start, silently regarding the Captain for some moments. Then a smile slowly wreathed her lips and she broke into a light laugh. Her right hand involuntarily sought her fan which slowly opened across the lower half of her face and she shot a glance at him over its rim with an ease and grace which only Spanish women have ever succeeded in mastering. The effect of this deft bit of coquetry, simple and natural as were all her actions, was not lost upon the Captain.

"I don't know whether I love you or not," it said

plainly as words, "but henceforth you shall be my slave."

"How long have you been there?" she asked at length, slowly lowering her fan.

"Only an instant, Señorita," he replied, raising his hat. "I was wondering," he continued, "whether it would be too much to ask you for one of those roses? One would not be missed among so many."

"Ah, but they are precious, Señor *Capitan* — these especially; they are my favorites," and she swept her hand caressingly over the bush beside which she was standing.

"For that reason I shall prize it all the more, Señorita."

"Ah! you men have a way of using flattery to women whenever you want anything of them. And yet," she continued with just the suggestion of a frown, "a woman would be hard hearted to refuse —" Her eyes dropped for an instant, then looking up again, she said hesitatingly: "I wonder if I can trust you?"

"Try me," he pleaded.

"I know it's foolish, but rather than have you think me less generous than the women you have known, I shall give you one little one, Captain Forest, that is, on condition you never ask me for another," and breaking off one of the largest half-blown blossoms, she held it in her hand as though loath to part with it.

"I promise," said the Captain solemnly, dismounting and holding his horse by the rein. "I dare not leave my horse, Señorita," he added in a tone of embarrassment, "he is unaccustomed to a town and feels

strange, and should he take it into his head to bolt, he might do the first person he met an injury."

"Indeed? I have often thought of your horse and wondered where you got him. But," she continued reluctantly, "since you cannot come to me, I suppose I must come to you," and passing through the gate, she stood before him, rose in hand.

"A truly magnificent animal," she said, running her hand gently along Starlight's neck. "I've been accustomed to horses from childhood and can't help admiring a good one when I see it."

Much to the Captain's surprise, the Chestnut did not resent her touch, but whinnied softly instead and laid his nose on her shoulder. Any one else but José and himself he would have seized with his teeth. Perhaps it was her way of approaching and handling him, or was it the subtle influence of that mysterious kinship which exists between the wild things — strange and inexplicable to all but themselves?

"I thought I possessed the only pure Arab in Mexico," she continued. "He's a small black horse with a white star in his forehead, and has never been beaten. You should look at the Raven some time — he would interest you," she added.

"I should like to. Arabs are rare on this side of the Atlantic. Where did you get him?"

"He was a present from Count Don Louis de Ortega, of the City of Mexico."

"Count Louis de Ortega?"

"Yes. He is the most charming old gentleman I know. He is Padre Antonio's great friend."

"Ah!" ejaculated the Captain as though relieved.

"I once spent a summer traveling in Europe with the Ortega family. But here is your rose, Captain Forest. I almost believe you forgot it. Horses are so much more interesting than flowers," and handing him the rose, she was back again in the garden before he could thank her.

"*Á Dios, Capitan* Forest," she continued with the softest accent imaginable, lingering unconsciously on his name as she paused on the other side of the gate. Again the little fan opened, and looking back over it with a bewitching smile and arched eyebrows and her head held coquettishly on one side, she said as if to herself: "I wonder how long he will keep it?"

His heart gave a great throb as he gazed upon that subtle, bewitching vision before him. "Forever, Señorita!" he was about to reply, but she was gone.

It might be argued that a woman of Chiquita's metal would not have shown her hand thus lightly. Let his infernal beast bolt and trample the whole town in the dust and himself in the bargain. If he wanted the rose, let him come and get it; not a step would she move! Possibly, but let it not be forgotten that she was in love — desperately in love; that the time for quibbling had passed, that another woman equally fair would have unhesitatingly waded through a river to deliver that rose to the Captain had he asked for it. Destiny had placed Captain Forest in the saddle, just as it had decreed that Don Felipe Ramirez should pass the remainder of his days pursuing an illusive vision. If nature and convention now swarmed at the Captain's

saddle-bow, surely it was no fault of his. Had he not burnt his last bridge, snapped his fingers in the face of the world, and turned his back upon it and ridden forth in search of the lost kingdom of Earth?

XIII

"THE jade — coquetting openly on the high-road!" cried the Señora furiously, stepping out from the shadow of the wall after the Captain had disappeared down the road.

"Will she stop at nothing? It's true, she loves him! What would Don Felipe do had he witnessed what she had just seen?" and she shuddered as she paused breathlessly before the high iron gate, her cheeks aglow and her eyes flashing with indignation. Cautiously pushing open the gate which stood ajar, she paused for an instant on the inside, casting her eyes nervously about her in search of Chiquita, but seeing no one, she advanced slowly along the walk leading in the direction of the house. She had not far to go before she came upon the object of her quest, seated on a rough stone bench in the shade of a thick cluster of tamarisk bushes which grew close to the wall.

The surprise Chiquita felt on seeing the Señora standing before her so unexpectedly, caused her to let fall the book which she was vainly endeavoring to read — an action which the Señora regarded as an admission of her guilt; and she exulted in her evident embarrassment.

The episode of the rose had caused her to quite forget her mission for the moment. From her general

air of excitement, flushed face and flashing eyes, Chiquita rightly conjectured that something unusual had happened and that an outburst of some sort or other was imminent. It came like an explosion.

"Holy Virgin!" she cried, eyeing Chiquita critically. "What is the meaning of this; dressed in your very best? Is this the Sabbath, or one of the blessed Saints' days, or perhaps a Palm-Sunday that you should array yourself thus? Mother of God! when has it become the fashion for young ladies to disport themselves in their best clothes on common, ordinary week days? Why, 'tis not even a Fish-Friday! Merciful Heaven! to what are we coming?" she gasped between breaths, clasping her hands and glancing heavenward. "Do such dresses grow upon bushes that they are so easily obtained? Doubtless," she concluded with withering sarcasm, "when they are worn threadbare as they soon will be owing to such constant usage, you will purchase others with those golden *pesos* which you earned so recently."

Chiquita, accustomed to the Señora's outbursts, did not deign an immediate reply, but sat quietly fanning herself, a faint smile wreathing her lips; she was thoroughly enjoying the Señora's discomfort. What would not the latter give to know something concerning those *pesos?* Chiquita's composure under the fire of her words only tended to increase her irritation.

"Oh, I know why you have thus suddenly turned the peacock! You do not deceive me! You have arrayed yourself thus for the grand Señor — *Capitan* Forest."

"Bah!" ejaculated Chiquita composedly, as though nothing unusual were taking place. "Is that all you have to say Doña Fernandez?"

"All! Is that not enough? Holy God!" she cried with increasing vexation. "You are in love — in love, I say!" A ripple of laughter bubbled over the two rosy petals of Chiquita's lips, revealing the pearly whiteness of her teeth. Now that she realized the real cause of the Señora's anger, it was impossible to become angry herself. The Señora, however, was by no means abashed by Chiquita's indifference, and vigorously renewed the attack.

"So our little ring-dove is in love, is she?" she continued mockingly, strutting back and forth before her. "You think *Capitan* Forest will notice you in that finery — that he will fall in love with you and will marry you, and that you will become a grand lady like the Señorita Lennox and ride in a fine carriage for the rest of your days. *Mercedes Dios!* and all because you have succeeded in turning the heads of a few country bumpkins that hang about the place casting sheep's-eyes at you. Ha, ha, ha!" she laughed derisively. "Believe me, when *Capitan* Forest makes up his mind to marry, he will not stoop so low to pick up so little."

"Doña Fernandez!" said Chiquita sharply rising from the bench with an ominous look in her eyes.

"Foolish child," Señora went on without heeding her, "to imagine that some day your hands will be white like a lady's! I suppose you have nothing

further to do to-day but to pick flowers?" she added, pausing for breath.

"I have never worried about my color, Doña Fernandez," replied Chiquita indignantly. "Indeed, I sometimes think it holds its own better than that of some persons I might mention."

"Holy Mother! how your tongue runs on! Am I not to be allowed to say anything? Oh, you do not deceive me! I saw you give him the rose as I came here. If he's sensible, he'll throw it away."

Chiquita laughed derisively. "Perhaps it is well for the world that all people are not so sensible as you are, Doña Fernandez," and her fan closed with a sudden snap. "So this is the advice you came to give me, Doña Fernandez? How very considerate of you!"

Her words recalled the Señora to the purpose of her coming. For some time she paced up and down before Chiquita without replying. Then stopping and facing her, and watching closely for the effect her words would have upon her, she said: "I came to tell you — that Don Felipe Ramirez has returned."

Chiquita started. "Don Felipe here?"

"Aye. He's stopping at my house, and I came to warn you that perhaps it would be well to be cautious and exercise a little more self-control than is your wont when in his and *Capitan* Forest's presence."

The Señora was satisfied with her morning's work; her words had had their effect. Besides, had she not had her say — unburdened her soul of many things which she had long been dying to give utterance to? All things considered she had scored.

"*Á Dios*, Señorita," she added sarcastically, her black eyes gleaming with malicious satisfaction as with mock courtesy she bowed and turned, leaving Chiquita silent and motionless, her eyes cast on the ground and lost in thought.

XIV

"DON FELIPE here? The coward, the cur! How dare he return?" she cried with a sudden outburst, her words ringing with indignation and resentment. She impatiently tapped the palm of her hand with her fan as she began to realize what his return might mean to her.

She knew that Señora had come to warn her not on her own account, but solely on Don Felipe's. Knowing as she did the reckless character of the man, she thoroughly realized the danger, and knew that she must be on her guard, not only for her own sake, but for Captain Forest's as well. Like the bird of ill omen that he was, his presence boded no good to her. Already she felt his baleful shadow fall across her path.

The unusual attention which Chiquita had begun to pay to her personal appearance did not escape the observant eye of Padre Antonio. Knowing the nature of woman as few men did, he was wise enough not to question her, experience having taught him that the majority of women can only keep a secret for a certain length of time. He smiled and admired, or twitted her with the simple remark: "For whom are we dressing this morning, Chiquita *mia*?" But she only

laughed in reply, or shaking her finger at him with a mysterious air, would say: "What woman would not dress for Padre Antonio?" But Padre Antonio was not so innocent as he tried to appear. Instinct, reënforced by long experience, told him that these were the first real symptoms of love which his wild little Indian girl, as he chose to call her, had shown.

He had always suspected that she never really cared for Don Felipe, and had done his best to break off the engagement before the catastrophe had overtaken the latter; but this was different. That of which he was loath to think, yet which he knew must inevitably happen, had come to pass.

His knowledge of human nature told him that she had at last met the man worthy of her love, but, he asked himself, would Captain Forest, of a different race and reared under totally different conditions, reciprocate that love? He could not endure the thought that his little girl might be made unhappy should the Captain fail to respond to her love.

He, too, had seen Chiquita give him the rose from his study window which overlooked the garden. So, when the sermon upon which he was engaged was completed, he quietly descended to the garden with the intention of administering to her a gentle admonition as well as giving her a little wholesome advice. Chiquita, hearing the sound of his measured tread on the gravel as he approached along the pathway, reseated herself on the bench and began to fan herself unconcernedly.

What a picture she made against the pale plumy branches of the tamarisk, thought Padre Antonio.

"I thought I heard voices," he said, seating himself beside her. "Has any one been here?"

"Doña Fernandez has just gone," replied Chiquita absently. "She has been giving me some of her advice."

"Advice?" echoed Padre Antonio, realizing the moment of his arrival to be most opportune. "That's just what I have come to give you, my child — advice!"

"What! You, too, Padre?" she exclaimed petulantly, looking at him inquiringly. "*Dios!* what have I done that everybody comes to give me advice when I have so many other things to think of?"

"Chiquita," slowly began Padre Antonio, laying his hand gently on her own, "I have always known you to be wiser than most women, the result no doubt, of your early life and training in the wilds where people must live by their wits for self-preservation if for nothing else." He paused that he might the better collect his thoughts. She guessed what was coming and began toying with her fan, an arch smile playing about her delicate, sensitive mouth as she regarded him out of the corners of her large dark eyes.

"Chiquita," he continued, "I do not like your extravagance. Have a care, child, lest you become addicted to vanity."

"Again, just what the Señora said! Am I so vain as all that, Padre *mio*, that you should be obliged to remind me of it?"

"Then why this continual display?" he asked pointedly. "You never used to show such consideration for your admirers." She felt that it would be

not only foolish, but worse than useless to attempt to fence about the truth with him.

"Ah, Padre *mio*," she sighed softly, blushing and laying her hand lightly on his shoulder and looking up into his face with deep lustrous eyes that softened with her words, "you — you forget — that I have never been in love before."

"In love!" echoed Padre Antonio in turn. "Ah! I knew it was that," and into his eyes there came an expression of tenderness and a far-away look as though the word recalled memories of other days. Memories which music or the glories of the sunset, or the cooing of the wood-dove at eventide might awaken within the soul. The sunlight played along the path at their feet. The breeze wafted the fragrance of the roses about them and a linnet, perched on the swaying branch of a tree overhead, gave voice to his song, singing of the joy of life. Again he sighed, and Chiquita looking up quickly, saw in his eyes that which she had never suspected.

"Padre *mio*," she said at length, lowering her eyes and slowly opening and shutting her fan, "have — have you ever been in love?"

"My child!" he cried with a start, suddenly recollecting where he was. "You forget what I am! What are you thinking of?"

"Oh, nothing, nothing!" she returned quietly. "Only it's so — so sweet to be in love, Padre *mio*. And yet so —"

"So what, my child?" he interrupted hurriedly, as

if to get through with the subject as quickly as possible.

"So terrible," she answered.

"So terrible?"

"Yes, terrible, Padre *mio*, for I never knew before how ugly I am."

"My poor child, you have quite lost your head!" he answered sympathetically.

"Ah, no," she said rising and facing him, "you do not understand; I have a most dangerous rival. To win the Señor I am compelled to use every means and strategy within my power. Can you not see?" she continued passionately; "she has everything; I have nothing. She is not only beautiful, but rich, and Blessed Virgin, what dresses she has, and jewels enough to cover an altar-cloth!"

"My child!" he cried. "You are merely jealous of the Señorita's beauty. For shame, that you should set such store upon worldly things!"

"Padre *mio*, you would not have your little Chiquita unhappy, would you?" she went on without heeding his words, a beseeching tone in her voice. "Should I fail to win Captain Forest's love, my heart will break!" She stood with downcast eyes before him, an expression of pain on her face.

"Ah, yes, my child, I understand," he answered compassionately, also rising from the bench. "Your temptation is great. Beware of pride and the vanities of this world, for he that exalteth himself shall be humbled.

"Chiquita," he continued earnestly, "my greatest care in bringing you up has ever been to keep you the pure and simple being that you were when you came to me. Do not forget — God demandeth that the souls which he gave into our keeping should be returned unto him again in the same pure unblemished state that we received them. Therefore, take heed, my child, for although God has endowed you with great beauty of both mind and body, do not foolishly imagine that, by arraying yourself in the vanities of this world, you can add an atom to the natural beauty He has bestowed upon you already. Be but pleasing in God's sight and it must follow that you will please all men as well."

"Oh! you really do think me beautiful, Padre?" she cried, a radiant look on her face.

"My child, my child, you do not listen to what I have to say!" he groaned despairingly.

"Oh, yes, I do, Padre *mio!* But you forget that, when God endowed woman with a soul, he gave her a heart as well. Willingly we render our souls unto God, but our hearts belong to men." The logic of her argument was too much for Padre Antonio, and he laughed as she had never seen him laugh before.

"Verily," he said at length, wiping the tears from his eyes and reseating himself on the bench, "the spirit and flesh must ever contend for the mastery of the soul on earth; it is our fate — the good Lord intended that it should be so."

"Ah, yes," she returned. "It's not always the good that seems to please us most in this world."

"Aye, verily!" he rejoined, relapsing into silence.

Again the linnet gave voice to his song, and the cooling breeze sighed among the tamarisk plumes that waved about their heads.

"Do you remember when you first came to me, Chiquita *mia?*" he asked at last.

"That was ten years ago, Padre."

"I then thought," he went on, "that the good Lord had sent you to me to make a little angel out of you, but —"

"Ah, Padre *mio,*" she interrupted, "it's too bad! I'm afraid I'm still the little devil that I was!" and laughing, she rose from her seat and passing around to his end of the bench, stood beside him and began to pull the leaves from a rose-bush.

"Padre *mio,*" she said softly, looking down at him with mischievous lights dancing in her eyes, "you don't really regret that I have remained what I am, do you?"

"Oh, I didn't mean to infer that, my child!" he answered with a note of reproach in his voice, looking up into her shadowy, downcast face. She gave a little laugh, and tapping him gently on one shoulder with her fan, said: "Do you know what you are, Padre *mio?*"

"What, my child?" he asked innocently, his face brightening at the question.

"You're the dearest old goose that ever lived!" and bending over him, she kissed him lightly on the crown of his head before he could prevent it.

"Chiquita, my child — you're too impulsive! Have I not repeatedly forbade you —" but the sound of her laughter and retreating footsteps on the pathway lead-

ing to the house was the only response his words invoked. "*Dios!*" he exclaimed, recovering his breath. "I sometimes think that God created man, but woman — the devil! They never listen to anything one has to tell them!"

Chiquita went quietly to her room, walked straight to her bureau and opening the lower drawer, took out a small pistol which lay concealed beneath a chemise in one corner. Examining it carefully with the practiced eye and hand of one who has been accustomed to the use of firearms all her life, she loaded it and then placed it inside her breast. She knew Don Felipe as no one else did, and thoroughly realized the danger that threatened her. From that hour, waking or sleeping, the weapon must never leave her.

XV

WHO was Richard Yankton? Many had asked that question, foremost of whom was Dick himself; but years of unremitting search had failed to reveal his origin.

In the spring of 1870 Colonel Yankton, who with his regiment of cavalry was stationed in Arizona, came one day upon the smoldering remains of an immigrant train — the work of the Apache Indians.

The scalped and mutilated remains of men, women and children lay scattered over the plain where they had fallen. It was a melancholy sight; one with which the Colonel had long become familiar during years of campaigning against the Red man. His scouts had picked up the trail and just as he was about to start in pursuit of the depredators, he fancied he heard a cry, causing him to pause and listen.

Presently the cry was repeated, and riding in the direction whence the sound proceeded, he came upon a little child of about two and a half years of age sitting on the ground among the sage-brush; the sole survivor of the disaster. It was a pretty, rosy-cheeked, dark-eyed baby — a boy. He was frightened at being left alone so long and was crying bitterly. But when he saw the Colonel looking down at him from the back of his horse, the little fellow brightened up. He forgot his

troubles, and ceasing to cry, began to laugh and stretch out his tiny hands, and in his incoherent baby way, began to babble.

"Horsie, horsie, widie!" he cried, in the most beseeching, irresistible manner, just as he must have been accustomed to ask the men of the camp for a ride whenever they appeared with a horse. In an instant the Colonel was on the ground and had the little fellow in his arms. As no clew to the child's parents or relatives was ever found, the Colonel adopted him, giving him his own name.

Dick received an excellent schooling up to his sixteenth year and probably would have entered West Point had not his benefactor suddenly died. Strange to say, the life of a soldier with which he had become familiar during the years spent at the different posts assigned to the Colonel, did not appeal to him. The restraint and routine of the life appeared irksome, and a year later the then great undeveloped West numbered him among her sons.

Indeed, as subsequent events proved, it was fortunate that he had renounced the life of a soldier. The success which later attended his efforts in the search for wealth far overshadowed that which he probably would have attained in the army, especially as his heart was not in the life.

Dick was a born miner and prospector, and passed successively through New Mexico, Arizona and California in his search for the precious metals, finally drifting into old Mexico where he met with his first important success.

It seemed as though he were directed by an invisible power. For weeks and months at a time he would idle — read and smoke and ride or travel. Then suddenly the spirit would move him, and without saying a word to any one, he would quietly slip away into the mountains by himself in whichever direction he seemed most impelled to go. Where other men paused and lingered in the hope of finding gold, he passed on and discovered the metal where others least expected to find it.

Perhaps one of the chief reasons for his success lay in the fact that he did not assert his own will by planning a systematic search for the metal, but allowed himself to be drawn by that mysterious, attractive affinity that existed between him and the precious metals. Dick became aware of the existence of this strange affinity early in his career and acted upon it. Already at the age of thirty he possessed two of the greatest gold and silver mines in the world and began to find it difficult to know what to do with his income.

The fact that he cared nothing for money beyond the simple comforts of life which it afforded, was perhaps another inscrutable reason why he was permitted during the course of the next eight years to add two more rich mines to his possessions.

At thirty-eight he owned four mines, the possession of any one of which would have caused the average man to see visions. For example, Dick would have regarded Colonel Van Ashton's fortune, handsome though it was, as mere loose change in his pocket.

But this modern young Crœsus was not unworthy

of the fortune that had been showered upon him so bountifully as the majority of men who acquire great wealth invariably become. He not only constantly strove to improve his mind, but maintained a pension-roll and list of public charities and beneficiaries that would have done credit to a small European Principality. In short, he thoroughly realized what the responsibility of great wealth entailed.

True to his supersensitive nature and fastidious taste, he always dressed in the height of fashion. This was the only extravagance he allowed himself which, considering his fortune, was reasonable enough.

Experience had taught him that the majority of men and women were fakirs pure and simple, whose chief motives were prompted solely by self-interest; and any suggestion to reform the world he invariably greeted with laughter. In fact, the world in his opinion, was not worth reforming; yet, in spite of this melancholy truth, he had remained human to the core, and took a live interest in that world of men which he knew to be nothing more nor less than a great gamble. And therein lay the chief distinction between him and Captain Forest, for they were otherwise strangely alike. Dick was still more or less interested in molding the clay — the Captain had done with it. Possibly because the latter had fallen heir to that which Dick had acquired through effort and, therefore, set less store upon it.

There were few countries which he had not visited. After making his first rich strike, he attempted to settle in New York, but was unable to do so. To use his own

words, "he was only able to sit down, but there wasn't room enough for him to stretch his arms and legs."

During his travels he had collected numerous works of art; tapestries, paintings, marbles and bronzes by the best modern masters, which he placed in a beautiful Spanish *hacienda* especially designed by one of the foremost architects of the day. The house occupied the site of an old Spanish *rancho* situated in a beautiful valley about ten miles from Santa Fé and was generally conceded to be the most attractive estate in Chihuahua, though not the largest and most valuable; Don Felipe Ramirez possessed that. Both house and garden were a living monument to Dick's natural refinement and good taste. There were no jarring notes or lavish, tawdry display, the pitfalls into which the parvenue and petit bourgeois invariably fall. This was his only hobby, and just why he indulged it, he himself would have found it difficult to answer, for in reality, he cared but little for it.

He regarded it chiefly as a precaution against old age. He would continue to improve and beautify the place until the day arrived when he would retire from the world to pass the few remaining years of life amid the quiet and seclusion which the country afforded. And he often pictured himself when alone and musing over his cigar, as a lonely, white-haired patriarch, without offspring to perpetuate his name, seated in the center of his *patio*, smiling benignly upon the frolicsome little brown children of his Indian retainers as they laughed and disported themselves about him.

"Ah!" cries the world. "Mr. Yankton has a his-

tory!" Of course. What man or woman has not, even though they dare not admit it? Had he loved too much or too little? There were even some who attributed that exquisite vein of melancholy in his nature to the shadow of a married woman. Was he haunted by the fear that some fair, false one might marry him for his fortune, not for himself? Or, was his aversion to marriage due solely to the fact that the right woman had not yet arrived?

These and many other questions had been asked and thoroughly discussed by the matrons and daughters of Santa Fé, especially by the latter, to all of whom he had made love and sent flowers and serenaded in turn until, out of sheer desperation, they called alternately upon God and the devil to keep or punish this gay Lothario who loved all and yet none, and who gave such exquisite *fiestas* in his beautiful *hacienda*.

Now it so chanced that, at the same hour Don Felipe was conducting Blanch and Bessie to the cañon, Dick was returning to Santa Fé on horseback from his *hacienda* where he had passed the night. As there was no particular reason why he should reach the *Posada* before noon, he decided to indulge his fancy by lingering in the cooling shade of the cañon close to the river's edge, where he might listen to the voices of the waters as they went singing by him on their way to the old town and thence to the sea.

He accordingly dismounted, and after lighting a fresh cigar, stretched himself at full length upon the grass which grew on the river's bank, allowing his horse to graze at will. Just behind him rose the abrupt wall

of the cañon some thirty or forty feet in height which, at this hour of the morning, cast a deep shadow over the spot where he lay and halfway across the river in front of him. It was just the sort of place for an Indian or one of Dick's nature to linger in and dream and muse. The tips of the tall grass and reeds which grew close to the water's edge, swayed gently in the fresh morning breeze. The song of the finch and linnet issued from the thick, low willow copse growing along the river's banks.

How peaceful it was, and how sweetly the waters sang! No wonder the Indian prized the peace and beauty of nature above all else. What was his *hacienda* to this? He was never really happy when the roof of a house intervened between himself and the sky.

Suddenly his attention was attracted by a noise overhead, and glancing upward, he sprang to his feet just in time to avoid a mass of earth and stones that came rolling down over the face of the cliff and fell on the very spot where he had been lying. The next instant, before he had time to realize what was happening, a soft, fluffy mass dropped into his arms with an impact that nearly brought him to his knees. For some seconds Dick looked hard at the object in his arms in order to assure himself that he really was awake and not still dreaming in the grass by the side of the river.

There was no doubt about it; the woman had arrived.

Miss Van Ashton lay quite still in his arms; she had fainted. For the first time in his life, a panic seized him.

"Miss Van Ashton!" he cried excitedly, bending over her. She seemed like nothing, as light as a feather as she lay so still and pale in his strong arms. It seemed as though he could have held her thus forever, and he was almost beginning to wish that he might as he watched the pallor of her face slowly give way to its natural pink and white glow, delicate as the lining of a conch-shell. Strange that he had not noted this peculiarly piquant and attractive face before.

"Miss Van Ashton!" he cried once more. But again there was no response. He lowered her gently on one knee in order that she might breathe more freely. As he did so, one of her hands came into sudden contact with his own. Instinctively his hand closed over it and held it captive; it was so soft and warm, just like a little bird. His soul was sorely tempted, and sad to relate, he raised it to his lips and held it there, at which juncture Bessie Van Ashton slowly opened her eyes.

With a cry, she was on her feet — flushed and furious.

"Don't be alarmed, Miss Van Ashton!" he exclaimed, quite unconscious of the cause of her sudden fright. "You're not hurt a bit; you didn't touch the ground. You only fainted."

"How dare you hold me in your arms?" she cried.

"I couldn't help it, Miss Van Ashton; you dropped right into them."

"How dare you kiss me, sir?"

"I couldn't help that either," stammered Dick, covered with confusion and blushing like a school-boy.

"Insolence!" cried Bessie with increased vehemence, stamping her small foot furiously on the ground.

"Miss Van Ashton," stammered Dick again, "I apologize! I — I beg your pardon —"

"For taking advantage of a helpless woman while in an unconscious state!" she interrupted. "A most gentlemanly act!" she added contemptuously. Her words cut him like the lash of a whip, causing him to wince, his face turning a deep red.

"I'm sorry —" he began.

"You know you're not sorry at all!" she broke in again with unabated fury.

"Miss Van Ashton," he said again, with increasing embarrassment, "when you fell into my arms I was so surprised and frightened —"

"Frightened?" She laughed in his face. "A man who single handed held a furious crowd of men at bay as you did — frightened? You mean that you were so overcome with weakness and the joy at finding a helpless woman in your power you could think of nothing better to do than to kiss her," she answered with all the sarcasm she could command.

A twinkle came into Dick's dark eyes as he regarded her for some time in silence.

"Miss Van Ashton," he said, "if you only knew it, you are far more dangerous than a tame mob of boys."

"Pshaw!" she exclaimed, turning her back upon him, and tapping the ground nervously with her daintily shod foot. Dick regarded her narrowly during the pause that ensued. She seemed taller than he at first had thought her, and was as slender as a birch. The

sun, which by this time had begun to peep over the top of the cañon wall, cast a golden aureole about her head. Again he heard the waters sing and the notes of the birds issuing from the willow copse.

"Well! how much longer are you going to stand there? Why don't you say something?" she snapped, still keeping her back turned toward him. Her words inspired him with fresh confidence. He recognized in them a faint glimmer of interest which even her fierce spirit of resentment had not entirely succeeded in overcoming.

"Miss Van Ashton, ignore me, trample me in the dust if you like, but do you know, if it had been any other woman than yourself, I should have laid her quietly down upon the ground and left her to regain consciousness as best she could!" She wheeled around abruptly, looking him straight in the eyes. There was no mistaking the sincerity of his words, or the look that accompanied them. And she instinctively felt that an impulsive, passionate nature like his could not have helped doing what he did.

"I don't believe a word you say," she said, softening somewhat, a faint smile lurking about the corners of her mouth. Then, as the ludicrousness of the situation came over her, she burst into fit after fit of laughter until the tears rolled down her cheeks.

"Oh, dear!" she sighed at length.

"You do forgive me!" he pleaded, picking up her dainty straw hat which lay on the ground close by and handing it to her.

"No, I don't forgive you. I don't think I ever

shall," she answered in the severest tone she could command. "It was foolish of me to wander away from the others," she continued. "I might have known that something would happen, because something is always happening in this country. It's perfectly marvelous!" Then, after a pause, during which she placed her hat rakishly on one side of her head, she added: "As a punishment, Mr. Yankton, I'll allow you to accompany me back to the *Posada.*" Her words caused his heart to jump.

"I don't deserve it," he answered, assuming an air and tone of humility.

"I'm glad you realize that," she returned. "I suppose I'm indebted to you for saving my life," she went on. "And I don't want you to think me ungrateful. Perhaps it would have been better though —" She broke off abruptly, and then laughed a strange little laugh that puzzled him greatly. She had at least grown communicative again, and he heaved a sigh of relief. He had gotten off so much easier than he expected.

"One moment, Miss Van Ashton," he said, as she was about to take the lead. He turned and gave a shrill whistle. His horse which had been feeding quietly the while on the grass a short distance from them, raised his head at the sound, and giving a low whinny, came trotting up to them.

"Won't you ride?" he asked, turning to her. "He's quite gentle."

"No," she answered rather curtly, "I prefer to walk."

"Just as you say," he answered in a tone of complete submission, taking his place quietly by her side.

"No — not that way!" she said. "We'll keep the horse's head between us."

XVI

THERE had been no more shooting or attempts at murder. The mail began to arrive from home, and Colonel Van Ashton and Mrs. Forest began to breathe easier.

Life at the old *Posada* had settled down once more to its accustomed calm and routine. The sun shone benignly and the birds sang daily in the garden where the guests were wont to pass the greater part of the day. The gay little songsters were a veritable revelation to them — especially to the Colonel. How could such gentle creatures go on singing with such indifference to the future in a land where life was held so cheap and all things so uncertain?

Blanch had turned a deaf ear to the others' entreaties to return home at once. The more they talked, the firmer she became, and finally, taking matters into her own hands, settled the question by telegraphing home for the twenty trunks of clothes she left there on her departure.

"Can't you see," she said by way of explanation, "how disastrous it would be to leave Jack alone in this country with that —"

"Don't mention her!" interrupted Mrs. Forest.

"I don't see how we can help it," replied Blanch, "since fate has thrust her unbidden into our lives.

We might as well recognize facts first as last since we are no longer in a position to choose either our surroundings or the persons with whom we are to associate. There is only one way to avert the catastrophe threatening us, and that is — by my marrying Jack."

Chiquita's beauty filled Mrs. Forest with a vague and nameless terror. But a glimpse of that dark siren was enough to apprise her of her son's peril, and she unhesitatingly implored Blanch not to let him out of her sight — to go off with him alone as often as possible and flirt with him to any length; a tremendous concession on Mrs. Forest's part — nothing less than a complete surrender, she being one of those proud but insipid mortals whose temperature could be easily gauged by the inclination of her long, slender, slightly upturned nose which seemed to be forever pointing toward a better world. For her, it was not enough that one's appearance and innate refinement marked one as a lady or a gentleman, but it must be proven by a long deduction beginning with some obscure ancestor of whom the world has never heard and whose shortcomings have been happily buried in the oblivion of time. Could she have had her way, the world would have been long since wrapped in pink tissue paper, tied with blue ribbon and labeled safe. How she ever came by her dauntless son remains a mystery; it certainly was no fault of hers.

Somebody of a pessimistic turn of mind once remarked that, if the human race were suddenly stripped naked, it would be impossible to distinguish the refined from the vulgar. A truly inspired utterance. For as Captain Forest viewed his family from his plane of

vantage, especially after the leveling process had set in, they strangely reminded him of a flock of tame geese rioting in a pond. They made a great noise and stir, but convinced nobody.

Everybody having reached his level and been shorn of airs and affectations, it no longer remained a question of what one was, but what one could do. Consequently, it became daily more and more difficult to distinguish between personalities. It is true there were occasional flashes suggestive of submerged, latent faculties, but only flashes; stupidity and the common-place were the dominating notes.

It was a wonderful study in human nature, and hopeless though the general outlook appeared, the future was not entirely without its promise. The souls of Blanch and Chiquita shone like radiant twin stars from out the gloomy, abysmal depths of the Egyptian darkness that had settled over the world.

Perhaps the most remarkable and amusing feature of it all was that, with the exception of Blanch, the others still seemed able to take themselves seriously. They regarded the Captain's new outlook upon life as a complete reversion to the primitive type, but luckily for them, he had not yet lost his sense of compassion.

Recognizing the deplorable mental state to which his uncle was fast sinking, he kept him supplied with wines and cigars, obtained from his friend, Pedro Romero, the gambler. No man can partake of excellent wines and cigars for any length of time without feeling his oats, as the saying goes; and the Colonel proved no exception to the rule.

He had just finished a bottle of Burgundy and, as he sat in the garden with his sister, sipping his *demi-tasse* and inhaling the fragrant aroma of a Havana, he began to feel the return of his nerve. In fact, had he been approached on the subject, he would have admitted that he felt like a fighting-cock, in just the proper condition to quarrel with his nephew. Happily for the Colonel, the subject of his thoughts came sauntering into view at this juncture, and he squared himself, assuming an aggressive attitude preparatory to the encounter which he intended to precipitate with all possible dispatch.

The disgusting complacency with which his nephew had taken to wearing long trousers over his riding-boots in place of those precious balloon breeches originally designed for lackeys but since adopted as a becoming apparel for a gentleman, affected the Colonel's tender susceptibilities to an extent almost inducing nausea. He quite forgot that he had been guilty of a similar offense during his campaigning in the Civil War, and naïvely imagined that his nephew had acquired this vulgar habit from his friend, Mr. Yankton; a person whose lack of etiquette and easy-going ways were enough to set his teeth on edge.

The Captain was looking for Blanch whom he had seen entering the garden with his mother and the Colonel, but whose return to the house he had not noticed, and he, therefore, walked unsuspectingly into the arms of his uncle.

"I wish you would get rid of that infernal horse of yours," began the Colonel by way of a preliminary to

the skirmish, while his nephew seated himself unconcernedly in a chair opposite him, tilting it backwards and leisurely crossing his legs. "He positively threatened to devour me bodily as I passed the corral this morning."

"I suppose it's because he has not yet learned that you are my uncle," replied the Captain, suppressing a smile. "It's strange what dislikes he takes to certain persons when one considers that he's as gentle as a kitten when children are around; but I'll try to teach him to distinguish members of the family in the future."

"Look here, Jack! I've had enough of this beating about the bush. It's time we came to an understanding."

"There's nothing to prevent it that I can see," answered the Captain with maddening coolness. "I was merely apologizing for an ill-mannered horse."

"Damn your horse, sir!" cried the Colonel with increasing choler.

"Any time you are ready, dear Uncle," replied the Captain calmly, taking a cigarette from his case and lighting it. The Colonel ground his teeth in silence. His first encounter with his nephew could hardly be called satisfactory and he did not wish a repetition of it. He had come to argue his nephew out of his folly through sheer force of logic and it behooved him to remain as calm as possible during the interview, for his nephew had a most surprising way of answering back and turning the argument against one.

"Tell me," he began, "what possible attraction this country can have for you?"

"It would be quite as impossible to explain that satisfactorily to you as to make my reasons clear for being here at all. But since you again ask me for those reasons, I can only answer as I did before. I have exhausted that felicitous state called civilization. I want to be free."

"Rot!" cried the Colonel, literally snorting and bounding into the air. "You've no right to be free! Only savages and criminals want to be free! If that's all you have to say —" but his voice choked and he resumed his seat in silence.

"I've never heard anything quite so silly!" exclaimed Mrs. Forest who up to this point had maintained a discreet silence.

"It's true nevertheless," continued the Captain composedly, blowing a ring of blue smoke into the air. "Civilization, you know, is practically the same the world over. I have seen and heard everything, read everything, and met everybody that's worth meeting, and I'm tired of seeing and hearing them over and over again, year in and year out, with always the dead certainty of their return to look forward to. Our lives have become too stilted, too artificial — we lack poise, we live in grooves. Everything is overdone — there is nothing left for us to enjoy — our finer sensibilities have become dulled — the simplicity and refinements of life have been swallowed up by luxury, tawdry display and prudism."

"Bosh!" cried the Colonel.

"Everybody," the Captain went on, "knows exactly what his neighbor thinks and is going to say,

and should anybody by any chance begin to think differently and seriously on life, society instantly brands that person as stupid, if not a little queer. We have lost our independence."

"Nonsense!" said Mrs. Forest.

"Granted for the sake of argument," broke in the Colonel, flipping the ash from off his cigar. "But what about art, science and literature, the real things which stand for civilization?"

"Oh! as to them, they are all right in themselves. It is fortunate that man has an outlet through these manifold channels of expression.

"They are the best part of our lives so far as they go, but all art and science and no nature, and what becomes of man? Have they made the world happy, and is there any immediate prospect of their ever doing so? Did the Greeks, who attained the supreme heights in art, find happiness in their art? Their history is the record of one long struggle; and so it was with the renaissance of the Middle Ages, and so it is with us; our sciences and arts can never change the complicated conditions in which we live. They have never developed the sympathy and brotherly love which should exist between man and man; we are still barbarians.

"The most miserable wretches that ever lived were the very ones that passed their lives creating and theorizing. They all forgot and are still forgetting like the rest of the world to-day that, these things, no matter how great, amuse and interest for a time only; that once they are absorbed, their original charm and

novelty are gone forever. They become worn and threadbare like all of man's inventions, and humanity is ever left searching for the great panacea of life.

"The God-inspired sing and talk of the great life, but they do not live it themselves, and that is why they never really succeed in delivering their messages. And they may continue to write books and compose music, to paint pictures and build temples and huc statues so long as this planet is habitable, but these things are merely an imitation of the reality — a reflection of the ideal in man. The delivered man must stand above his art and science. He must recognize that he himself is the well-spring, the source of his inspiration and is greater than his emotional expressions. The true message can never be delivered to the world until the life for which these things stand is actually lived out, becomes a part of man's daily life."

"And you intend to deliver that message, I suppose?" observed the Colonel sarcastically, smiling compassionately and twirling the end of his mustache.

"In my own humble way, yes, but I ask no man to follow me!" A chorus of laughter, in which were mingled the voices of Blanch and Bessie who had just joined the group, greeted this confession.

"Did you ever hear the like of the conceit?" exclaimed Mrs. Forest as the laughter subsided.

"Excuse my frankness, Jack, but you're an ass," said the Colonel tartly.

"You set an example to the world? Why, you're as spoiled as the rest of us!" cried Bessie.

"Quite true, Cousin, but with this difference, I realize that fact and the rest of you do not."

"What a charming pedestal you have placed yourself upon, Jack," said Blanch, seating herself beside Mrs. Forest.

"Perhaps," returned the Captain dryly, "but of one thing I am certain. Few people are better prepared to speak on this matter than I am."

"What an interesting lot we women must be in your eyes," broke in Bessie, digressing from the subject. Captain Forest smiled.

"Don't misunderstand me," he went on. "You are trumps, every one of you, if you only knew it, but unfortunately you do not. You are the most attractive women in the world, but you are spoiled — utterly spoiled. You are the well-groomed, lovely curled and pampered darlings of society, but alas! utterly superficial, just like those brilliant women of the great French revolutionary period."

"I admire your frankness, Jack; but what do you really intend doing? What sort of a life do you intend to lead?" asked Blanch.

"Cease chasing will-o'-the-wisps about in the vain pursuit of happiness, and live as man was intended to live by substituting nature's realities for man's creations; those things which we prize most — which please for a time, but which in the end leave us as empty handed as the day we first started in quest of the *golden fleece.* Live as close as possible to nature; cultivate the soil, watch the fruit and the flowers and the grain grow,

and roam throughout the length and breadth of the land when the longing seizes me."

"What!" cried the Colonel, unable to contain himself any longer. "Is this the inane, prosaic existence for which you have given up one of the most brilliant careers the world had to offer a man? It's bad enough to have wrecked that, but for one possessing the wealth you do to waste his life after such fashion; it's simply disgusting! Think of what you might do in the financial world!"

"That's just the sort of answer one might expect from you," replied the Captain, taking a fresh pull at his cigarette. "You talk like a stockbroker. That phase of labor brings no real happiness to any one. Besides, it would be absurd for one possessing the money I do to spend his days earning more. Of course as things are constituted to-day, it is difficult to get along without money, but in reality I don't consider it has anything to do with happiness. Lasting pleasure and peace can only be found in the verities of nature; her beauties and realities are the only satisfying and enduring things.

"What can you who pass your days amid the noise and dirt of cities, breathing their tainted atmosphere, and your intellects nourished upon artificialities and the creations of men's minds, know of nature? How many of you have ever gazed long enough at the stars to appreciate their beauty and mystery, or listened to the sound of the wind and tried to guess its meaning?"

"Bah! you are as sentimental as a school-girl!"

ejaculated the Colonel. "You talk like one who has just taken a short course in Thoreau or Rousseau."

The Captain only laughed in return. He rose from his seat and began striding up and down before them with his hands clasped behind his back and his gaze fixed on the ground.

"Who are you," he continued passionately, stopping abruptly before them, "to assume that others should live according to your lackadaisical, sensuous sentimentality — your divan, boudoir conceptions of life? Thoreau and Rousseau and Emerson and Ruskin were great men, but had they talked less and actually lived out the life they preached, the world might possibly have been aroused to a consciousness of something higher by this time; but they were too small for the task. It requires a man cast in a bigger mold to perform the work — it is only in men like me that the future hope of the race lies. I must *live* the life they preached. Do you understand? Why, I could crush you and the world you represent in the hollow of my hand! You seek happiness in the evanescent wine and laughter of the illusive, superficial life. I, too, sought it there, but like you, I did not find it."

His words sank deep into the soul of Blanch. She admired his strength and yet hated him for it. Why, she asked herself again, as she did on the day he first imparted his new views of life to her, was she not moved? Why was she still unable to thrill at the sound of his words?

She could not understand it. There seemed to be something lacking either in him or in her.

"What assurance have you," she asked, "that you will find happiness in this new life which you propose to lead?"

"The consciousness which tells me I exist, voices the fulfillment of that promise. There can be no doubt of it. The traditions that have come down to us from the past from all nations that once men were free, is no myth. The true poetry of life, I repeat, is not found in the epics men have created, but in the sources that inspired them. In the glories of the earth and the air, in the stars and mountains and forests and fields and streams, in man, in the birds and animals, in the turning of the soil with the plow and the spade, and in the growing corn. These are the things which, before all else, add to the spiritual growth of man and inspire him to pray and hope, to sing and to love, and draw him close to the invisible world because they are a part of the life of man, not imitations of life. The instant man realizes this he will be free.

"I know you cannot understand this," he continued with a shade of impatience in his voice, "for what can a lot of slaves like you, the brick and mortar type of man, know of freedom, all that is best and noble in life? You are so bound to the world of your own creating that it has become as meaningless as a fancy to you. Your souls run on the dead level; the great song of life sweeps by you unheeded, and is gone forever."

XVII

SEÑORA FERNANDEZ erred in her judgment of Don Felipe, which was but natural. She still regarded him as the impetuous, hot-headed youth of former days, not what he really was — the mature man, sobered by years of experience and suffering which had taught him the value of self-control.

He understood the nature, knew as never before the mettle of the woman with whom he had to deal, and on no account would he foolishly precipitate a quarrel with the Captain. He would bide his time and strike only when the moment seemed propitious. The vague rumors which were current concerning Chiquita must have some foundation, else why the continual gossip on every tongue? He would investigate the matter for himself, in his own time and way; meanwhile he would reinstate himself in the good graces of the community by making himself as agreeable and popular as possible, a thing not difficult for one of his wealth and accomplishments.

He had doffed his Mexican costume for the more prosaic attire of the modern man which became him equally well and which was more to his liking. To the cosmopolitan that he had become, the place and the people had shrunk terribly during his absence, and there seemed to be little left in common between him and them.

The presence of the Americans was a godsend to him, while he in turn was like a fresh breeze from the outer world to them.

He instinctively recognized a confederate in Blanch. They possessed a common interest and spent much time together. Strange that the same fate which had overtaken him was now threatening her! Those who deny a fixed destiny and can therefore afford to ignore the laughter of the gods, may answer with some assurance that the lives of most people, especially the marked ones, are tragic — perhaps. But why had Colonel Van Ashton, the bon-vivant and habitué of clubs, the adored of pretty young women and confidant of duennas, taken the one road which led to the wilderness when it is well known that all roads lead to Rome, especially when the Colonel had about as much interest in his present surroundings as a polar bear might reasonably expect to find on the equator? Possibly it was for the same reason that the Colonel also watched with increasing alarm the sudden and growing interest which his daughter began to take in the man he detested most on earth.

Reveal the cause, the hidden well-spring of destiny, and the effect may be predicted with comparative accuracy. Can the lamb lie down with the lion? Were there ever substantial grounds for the assertion, or was it only metaphor — mere poetical allusion? The world has been on the *qui vive* for the fulfillment of prophecy ever since the expulsion of our common ancestry from Eden. The actual motives and reasons which underlie the workings of destiny are usually about as clear as those which bereft Samson of his locks or left the lone

figure of Marius seated amid the ruins of Carthage. And yet, even in the face of time-worn contradictions apparent to the most superficial and credulously minded, pretty, distracting Bessie Van Ashton had begun to cast her eyes in the direction of Dick Yankton, the handsome, open-handed, devil-may-care son of nature who regarded the world of fashion to which she belonged with about as much concern as he did the dust on his boots.

Possibly *ennui* prompted this willful bit of womanhood to make a plaything of that picturesque child of nature, just as loneliness caused him to open his eyes to the existence of that, which in the logical and ordinary course of events, he would have entirely overlooked. But since life is made up almost entirely of contraries, it is not so much with reasons that we have to deal as with facts — things as they are. Clothe human nature in whatever garb you like, at heart it remains the same. Time and place and condition make little difference; the real man within is sure to assert himself at some time or other by throwing off the disguise.

Was Bessie, the spoilt, pampered child of fashion with her soft, white body, any more fit for a life lived close to nature than Blanch who was naturally strong, sinuous and supple, though so softened by luxury and the overrefinements of civilization? To all appearances, no. And yet, the very things which seemed to pass by Blanch unheeded, began imperceptibly to impress themselves upon Bessie. Possibly because Blanch was so strong and individualized that, having once given

herself up wholly to the present life, she was enslaved irrevocably by it — held fast by it with a power that had grown with her strength day by day — so that while a weaker woman might slip through the meshes and escape, she was held irresistibly bound through her own force and strength of character.

The spell and magic of the land seemed to hold like an unseen hand all things as in the grip of a vice, and were no less potent in the present than they were in the past. The plaintive notes of the wood-dove found a response within Bessie's soul. The winds seemed laden with new voices and unconsciously interrupted the train of her thoughts and caused her to pause and listen and wonder. The wild, forbidding landscape from which her stronger companion involuntarily shrank, for some unknown reason attracted her. The broad expanse of heaven and earth, the far horizon, the hazy, mysterious silhouetted peaks of distant mountains aroused vague longings within her — emotions which she did not understand and concerning which she failed in her attempts to analyze.

Had she been at home, she would have regarded these new sensations as sentimental enthusiasm and laughed at them, denying them a permanent place in her nature. But here, it was different. They seemed to have a hold upon one and were as irresistible as those vague longings that come with the awakening of spring. There was music everywhere in the world about her. Flowers of the imagination sprang from the desert on every hand. Voices and hands called and beckoned to her from out the unseen. The quickening and awakening

within her gave promise of a new life, and her feet became light as sunbeams. The fact of being alive and the increasing desire to live filled her with a new joy and vigor that darted through her soul like tongues of flame, causing her blood to surge and tingle as never before since the days of childhood.

A genuine interest in the new life and the lives of those about her, took the place of the apathy and indifference with which she regarded the sated pleasures of that jaded world from which she had departed so recently. She had come to be bored — fully resigned for Blanch's sake to endure the *ennui* of mere vegetation until the prodigal Jack had been safely gathered within the fold once more. After the rude shock of first impressions had passed and she had found time to pause and breathe, she began to cast her eyes about her for something more real and tangible than the memories of the world she had left behind her, but had failed to find anything of interest until the occurrence of that unfortunate episode with Dick.

His arms still clung to her in spite of the persistent efforts she made to shake them off. And stranger still, no amount of scrubbing seemed to remove the sting of those burning kisses he had impressed upon her hand. That unpardonable piece of impudence was unprecedented. Men had made love to her, adored her, and completely lost their heads over her; and one man in particular, as she well knew, was scouring the ends of the earth in an effort to obtain news of her present whereabouts. Much to her astonishment, however, and contrary to her preconceived notions concerning men,

she found that she had suddenly lost interest in this particular man for another.

But why? What was the cause of this newly awakened interest in Dick? Was it because he was so different from the men she had known, or was it that strong touch of the feminine in him which certain sensitive masculine natures possess; that rare, distinguishing characteristic which is so attractive to men and women alike? Did any real affinity exist between them? How could it, considering the different conditions and environment in which they had been reared and the width of the gulf that divided them? What then was the cause of this attraction which in spite of her efforts to check it, was beginning to become a source of vexation to a woman of the world who had always prided herself on being able to keep herself well in hand?

That it might be love, or even the dawning of love, she refused to admit. She shuddered at the mere thought of such a catastrophe. The thing, however, was becoming annoying. Like any thought which we hold too long in our minds, it was bound to absorb all others in time, and she resolved to make an end of it. She would play with him. One could not maintain a serious interest in that which one treated as a jest — held up to ridicule. She would play with him like an expert angler plays with a fish, and when landed, would walk over him rough-shod — trample him back into the dust of that coarser clay from which he sprang.

Ah, yes, the country was not so dull after all! It would be a royal lark; a holiday long to be remembered. They were so far from the great world that, when it

was all over, not even the slightest rumor or breath of scandal would remain to remind her of the flirtation upon which she had decided to embark.

With these thoughts running through her mind, the fascinating, violet-eyed daughter of Colonel Van Ashton lightly dipped the tips of her dainty fingers into a rouge-pot, glanced into the mirror and drew them across her lips, and then deliberately attired herself in one of her smartest gowns preparatory to flinging the first bones of condescension to the rustic Yankton; the preliminaries of a series of expectations and hopes deferred that were intended to reduce him to a state of submission suitable to receive the final kick which was to leave Mr. Yankton a wiser but a sadder man.

XVIII

BLANCH stood before a long mirror that adorned one of the walls of her room, trying the effect of a new tea-gown.

The mirror was an ancient piece of furniture consisting of a faded gilt frame and six separate rows of large, unevenly fitting squares of glass; the style that was in vogue two centuries ago. As she regarded herself in it, she saw herself reflected in sections, probably with much the same effect as Marie Antoinette saw her reflection at Versailles.

"Coronada must have brought this mirror with him on his first expedition," she remarked to Bessie who lounged on the sofa on the opposite side of the room amid a heap of florid cushions. "I feel as though I had a personal grudge against that man," she continued, vainly endeavoring to catch an unbroken outline of herself in the glass.

"It's stunning, Blanch!" broke in Bessie from the sofa. "What is it — a Worth?"

"No — a Doucet. Isn't it absurd that I should array myself in these gorgeous gowns to compete with that Indian in her few flimsy calicoes and silks? The contrast is out of all proportion. It's the sublime and the ridiculous. And yet she looks well in anything!

Dress her in rags and she is picturesque; robe her in silks and she is fascinating."

"That's just what I can't understand," said Bessie. "We couldn't wear her clothes, but she can wear ours. Why is it?"

"It's quite simple. We have been handicapped from the start because we have been forced to compete with them on their own ground. They are perfectly natural; they have nothing and aspire to nothing, while we are wholly artificial — have everything and aspire to more."

"Why, to hear you, one would think that Jack was talking!" exclaimed Bessie in genuine surprise.

"Oh! I don't pretend to agree with his views, but as regards us, he's about right. I was never able to see ourselves as some others see us until we came here. And I have come to the conclusion that our views of life are about as distorted as the cracked reflection of myself in the mirror yonder. We have unconsciously lived a life antagonistic to nature and consequently find ourselves ridiculous in our simplest endeavors to be natural. Of course," she added, "they would appear the same if things were reversed and we had them on our ground.

"With us," she went on, "marriage is more a game of intrigue than love; here it is purely one of sentiment. Aside from my intrinsic value, what weapon have I to employ against this Indian woman? The things which count for so much with us, fall flat here.

"Why, I'm not even in a position to make Jack jealous! If I were at home, I would have a dozen

men at my feet and as many more as I wished to play off against him, not to mention the thousand opportunities for neglect. In fact, all the weapons which we women are so fond of employing against men. Whereas, here I am at the feet of my Lord Jack — his indifference is insufferable! Oh! I'll pay him back for this!" she cried, pale with anger.

"Men are brutes — all of them!" remarked Bessie laconically, rising to a sitting posture on the sofa.

"I hate him — hate him!" continued Blanch in a fresh paroxysm of passion. "To think that he of all men should have been the one chosen to show me myself — the only one of us who was strong enough to break away! Why was I not able to hold him? Why am I not able to come to him now? There is something wrong somewhere. We seem to have lost our grip on things. I can't understand it!" Just then the old, gilt French clock on the white marble mantelpiece slowly chimed the hour of five. The sound of the clock caused Blanch to pause. "Five o'clock," she said, calming herself. "Don Felipe will be waiting for us in the garden."

"That's so," answered Bessie, rising from the sofa and crossing the room to the window which looked out over the *patio* into the garden. "There he is now, pacing back and forth beneath the trees. What a restless man he is!"

"After the first cup, you might disappear, Bess," said Blanch. "I want to try to find out if he still cares for that Indian?"

"That was the most romantic thing I ever heard!" exclaimed Bessie.

"I wonder he ever returned," answered Blanch, opening the door and leading the way across the *patio* in the direction of the garden. The tinkle of a guitar attracted their attention to a group of *peons* and women squatted on their heels on one side of the court, in the shade of the arcades, smoking and chatting. A little beyond them, in the shadow of the doorway, stood the major-domo, Juan Ramon and the pretty housekeeper, Rosita.

"*Dios!* but she is *magnifico* — the tall one!" whispered Juan to Rosita as the girls passed them, nodding and smiling in response to Juan's deep salutation and Rosita's courtesy.

"And the little one," said Rosita in turn. "Is she not like a half-blown pink rose?"

"Aye! 'tis a feast for the eyes to look at them!" answered Juan. "There has not been so much life in the place since the old days when the Master was alive."

"If Don Felipe doesn't marry one of them he's a fool," added Rosita.

"That's just what I have been saying to myself," returned Juan.

"What else can he be doing here if he doesn't intend to take one of them back to his *hacienda* with him?" continued Rosita. "I've noticed that he and the tall one spend much time together."

"Aye!" ejaculated Juan. "It must be lonely at the old *rancho* without a woman to keep him company."

"The tall Señorita would be just the one for the place!" exclaimed Rosita enthusiastically.

"Rosita *mia*," began Juan confidentially after a short silence, during which his gaze rested pensively on the retreating figures of the girls, "I've just been thinking that there is no happiness for a man, still less for a woman, in a single life. What say you, Rosita *mia*," he went on, patting her familiarly on the cheek.

"Juan Ramon," interrupted Rosita with an angry flush, "if you don't want to get your face slapped, you had better behave like a *Caballero!*"

"*Caramba!* what a little spitfire!" returned Juan, pulling the end of his thin mustache, yet not in the least disconcerted by her show of temper. "But supposing, my pearl of a housekeeper, that I bought a neat little *rancheria* — do you know of any one who might care to look after it?"

"Bah! First pay your gambling debts, Juan Ramon. There will then be time enough to look for some one who will allow herself to be beaten on feast-days when you have drunk more *pulque* than is good for you. But *Dios!* why am I wasting words with you? The Señoritas will begin to wonder what has become of their chocolate and *tortillas* if I don't hurry."

"Ungrateful woman," responded Juan, assuming an injured tone. "Would you leave me without a kiss?"

"Holy Mother! what has come over you, Juan Ramon — has the sunshine gone to your head? A kiss, indeed!" and she tossed her head. "Go to Petronita, the cook! She is old; doubtless she will give you a plenty!" and laughing, she hurried into the dining-room in search

of a tray with which to serve the ladies. The mere mention of the ancient, withered Petronita, with the parchment-like face, caused Juan's mouth to pucker as though he had bitten into an unripe persimmon.

"*Diablos!* if the luck would only change!" he muttered. "Rosita would be the very one —" The sound of light footsteps and the tinkle of spurs caused Juan to turn.

"Ah! *buenas dias*, Señorita!" he exclaimed, lifting his hat and bowing before Chiquita, who had entered the *patio* from the opposite side of the house. Her riding-habit, her boots and gloves and gray felt hat beneath which were twisted her thick braids of hair, were covered with thin white particles of dust.

"Where is your mistress, Doña Fernandez, Juan?" she asked.

"I will call her, Señorita," answered Juan, replacing his hat on his head and starting for the hallway.

"Never mind, Juan," called Chiquita, catching sight of Blanch and Bessie in the distance. "I will first speak with the Señoritas," and she turned toward the garden.

Juan's beady black eyes followed her tall figure as she moved toward the girls. Ever since the arrival of the Americans there had been much discussion in the household as to which was the more beautiful, Blanch or Chiquita. The Señora's dislike for the latter was well known, but in spite of this prejudice, opinion was pretty evenly divided concerning the merits of the two. It was a vexing question, and the opportunity of comparing the two women as they met in the garden was too

tempting to be missed. So, with one end of his *zerape* slung carelessly over his shoulder, Juan strolled casually past the little group of women in the direction of the corrals, where he could observe them at his leisure from the recesses of the garden without attracting attention.

Notwithstanding the fact that the dark woman was at a disadvantage in her dust-covered riding-habit, he could not for the life of him tell which was the more beautiful of the two as he passed behind a thicket of lilac bushes, and seated himself on a rustic bench and began rolling a *cigarillo* between his long slim fingers.

Juan was a born gambler, and like all of his tribe, was usually in want of money. To-day he needed it more than ever, for that very morning his mistress had taunted him and threatened to leave him if he did not pay for the new dresses she had recently purchased, and for which she was now being dunned by her creditors. Never had he had such a run of bad luck. During the great week of the *Fiesta* he had tried everything from roulette to monte, but fortune's wheel had turned steadily against him. It was truly the devil's own luck and no mistake. If only the luck would turn, he would quit the game of chance forever — cast off the ungrateful Dolores, and . . . He drew a much-worn pack of cards from his breast pocket and began cutting them with a dexterity acquired through long years of practice.

Like all of his race, and the majority of mankind for that matter, he was intensely superstitious. Three times in succession he cut and dealt the cards, and three times

the ace of hearts, the luckiest card in the pack, turned face upwards on the bench.

"*Santa Maria!* 'tis a miracle — the luck has changed at last!" he muttered excitedly, as with dilated eyes and trembling hands he gathered up the cards and replaced them carefully in his pocket. His dream of the *hacienda* and the fair Rosita might yet come true. But how? The cards were too fickle to trust for long. Just then the rich, deep voice of Chiquita fell upon his ears. Without knowing why, yet intuitively he seemed to connect her with the turn in his fortune — and it set him thinking.

Ever since the *Fiesta*, curiosity had prompted him to learn something concerning Chiquita's motive for dancing; and whenever the opportunity presented itself, he had shadowed her. His patience was soon rewarded by learning that she made frequent visits to the Indian *pueblo*, Onava, often riding there in the late evening under cover of the dusk. On one occasion he saw an Indian ride forth from the village and meet her on the plain where she awaited him. They engaged in long and earnest conversation, at the end of which he fancied he saw Chiquita draw nearer to her companion and hand him something, and then the darkness shut them from view. He did not dare follow her farther or enter the village, for fear of attracting suspicion to himself; but surely this was a clew to something, to the mystery, perhaps.

At this juncture, Juan rolled a fresh *cigarillo* as he listened to the voices of the women, his eyes resting on Captain Forest's horse in the corral beyond the garden.

The animal fascinated him; never had he laid eyes on such a superb creature. Each day he visited the corral for a look at him, and each time the Chestnut would rush at him with ears laid flat on his neck and mouth wide open, displaying his formidable teeth.

"*Caramba!* what an animal to stock a *rancho* with, if only—" Juan sighed, and for some moments roundly cursed the past run of cards. The afternoon sun was pleasantly warm, and the shade sleep inviting. He threw the burnt end of his *cigarillo* on the ground, and, drawing up his feet, stretched himself at full length on the bench — the upper half of his fox-like face appearing just above the edge of his *zerape*.

Dios! was it not better to sleep and even dream bad dreams, than waking, meditate upon the misfortunes of life?

XIX

WHEN Chiquita entered the garden, she had just returned from an Indian Mission School for girls, some ten miles distant from Santa Fé, whither she rode once a week to instruct its pupils in the art of blanket and basket weaving; an art which she had practiced from her earliest days.

Her affair with Don Felipe was bad enough, and though she had been generally condemned for it, her woman's prerogative was recognized nevertheless. But for a lady, and ward of a priest, to dance in public and for money, was a thing unheard of; and gossip was fast giving her an unenviable reputation. This latest escapade, as it was generally termed, had nearly cost her her position in the school. When, however, it was taken into consideration that her services were gratuitous and that it would be impossible to replace her by any one else half as competent, the directors of the institution discreetly demurred, deciding that it would be better to humor the caprices of this fair barbarian who ruled supreme in her department.

The greeting which took place between her and Blanch was cordial enough to all outward appearances. Considering the tension and delicacy of the situation, the volcanic nature of the two and the intense longing of each to fly at the other and settle their differences then

and there, the self-control of the two was commendable in the extreme.

"Do you ride much, Señorita?" asked Blanch, eyeing critically her riding-skirt and wondering how it was that such an antiquated cut could sit her so well.

"I don't think I could live without a horse," replied Chiquita. "I often think I must have been born on one; at least, I can't remember the day when I first learned to ride. It was good to get back here after my six years at school for the sake of riding, if for nothing else. I don't believe either of you know what the real joys of riding are," she went on, pulling the glove from her right hand and sipping the chocolate which Bessie had handed her.

"Not until one has passed weeks and months in the saddle at a time does one thoroughly realize what riding means, or appreciate the worth and companionship of a horse." She paused, and a look of longing came into her large, lustrous eyes, as the memory of her early life came back to her, when she, with her people, roamed free through the land.

"*Dios!* but I have been unhappy ever since you came, Señorita," she resumed, changing the subject abruptly and addressing Blanch. "The knowledge that you are constantly near him almost drives me mad at times. And your dresses — they haunt me in my dreams! I never before imagined that dress was of so much importance in this world." She was so outspoken and withal so natural, that both Blanch and Bessie burst into a peal of good-natured laughter in which Chiquita joined.

"We women," she continued, taking another sip of chocolate, "have nothing to fall back upon except our old antiquated Spanish costumes — you can imagine what we would look like in the modern clothes we procured here. I have never been placed in such a ridiculous position before, and if I only knew that you were as miserable as I am, I think I might begin to enjoy the humor of the situation." Again all three laughed.

"Ah, love, what a thing is love!" she sighed, placing her slender gloved hand over her heart. "It makes one as miserable as it does happy." Then suddenly turning to Blanch, she asked: "Have you always dressed like that?"

"I have always tried to live up to a certain standard," replied Blanch.

"And how long have you known him?"

"Oh! as long as I can remember — twenty years, perhaps."

"Twenty years, and always looked like that and not married to him? Sweet Mother of God!" she cried in the quaintest tone imaginable, sinking back in her chair. "Had I known him as many weeks I had either married him or killed myself!"

"Nobody takes love so seriously as that!" laughed Blanch.

"Ah! you have never loved him!" she said, after a short silence.

"Why do you suppose I am here?" returned Blanch.

"Then how could you have lived near him all these years without marrying him?"

"It was a mistake, I admit," answered Blanch good-humoredly. "But you must understand that we don't regard love in quite the same light as you do. We don't make a great fuss about it and talk of killing ourselves, and that sort of thing. We get married when we find it convenient."

"Ah, yes, I know," answered Chiquita, "but I'm sure you can never be as much to him as I can. What have you endured, what have you suffered to make you feel and realize the full significance of love?"

"Do you imagine," asked Blanch in surprise, "that there is any less of the woman in me because I have been spared the things which you perhaps have been forced to endure, or that one must first suffer before one is capable of loving?"

"No, I don't think that, for love is a thing like sleep, it comes upon us unawares. But it seems to me I am better fitted for him than you are; that my love, tempered by my life's experience, must be fuller and deeper and richer than that which you have to offer him. What," she continued, "do you really know of life? Not the social side of it, of which your life has been so full, but life as it really is? Were you born under the open heavens? Have you slept on the hard, cold ground, exposed to the weather, or nearly perished of hunger and thirst? Could you feed and clothe yourself from the naked earth without the assistance of others? Have you seen men, women and children starve, or ruthlessly struck down by your side, or nursed them through some terrible scourge like the smallpox?

"All your life you have been protected and cared for,

while all my life I have been obliged to face the reality of things, forced to work, to procure the simple necessities of life. I have carried wood and water, cooked, and fed and clothed myself and others with the materials provided by my own hands. And yet, when I look back upon my life, I would not surrender one hour of the true happiness the day's work brought with it could I thereby have escaped the suffering and bitterness it often entailed. Barren though my life may appear from your point of view, I know it to be infinitely rich in comparison to yours, for, as I have said, you have never known what life really means — never experienced its hardships, never beheld the bright face of danger, nor tasted the joys of the great free life in the open, the simple daily life devoid of the cares of civilized men, without which the life of a man can never be complete, be he what he may.

" 'Where the foot rests, that is home,' is a saying among my people; a truth, that so far as my experience goes, has never been gainsaid."

In spite of themselves and the fact that they could not wholly comprehend the weight and significance of her words, they were fascinated by her discourse, emphasized and illustrated as it was by the dramatic intensity of her gestures and expression.

" Señorita," said Blanch at last, breaking the silence that ensued, " I believe you are still at heart the savage, or better, the nomad you were when you lived in the wilderness."

" When I lived in the Garden of Eden, in God's world, not man's, is what you mean," she replied.

"Do you never have a desire to return to it?" asked Bessie.

"The old days can never be effaced," answered Chiquita. "My thoughts continually revert to them when, as a little girl, I used to set meat and drink before my father and his guests as they sat in a circle about the fire in the center of his lodge or in our house and smoked the long red clay pipes, or, after the crops were harvested, roamed through the land during the hunting season; sometimes afoot, at other times in canoes or on horseback. There are times when such an insatiable longing for the old life seizes me that I become almost unmanageable. I long to throw myself down in the open — lie close in the embrace of Mother Earth, and breathe the smoke of the camp-fire. My unrest is like that of the birds when the spell of the spring and the autumn comes upon them and the migratory instinct seizes them, or like that of the great herds of reindeer in the North which travel each year to the sea to drink of its salty waters, and which, if prevented, die."

"Do you know," said Bessie to Blanch a little later, when they were alone in their room, "she's fascinating when she talks like that."

"Ah! that's just where the danger lies," answered Blanch. "Think of what might happen if she starts talking like that to Jack — it's just what he's waiting to hear."

XX

JUAN must have fallen asleep. As he lay stretched upon the bench, he was awakened suddenly by the sound of vehement, passionate words.

Peering cautiously through the bushes, he beheld Chiquita and Don Felipe standing facing one another in the same spot where the three women had been but a short time before. He was not near enough to overhear the conversation, but judging from the vehemence of their gestures and high-pitched voices, he rightly conjectured that their meeting was anything but an amicable one.

On seeing Chiquita with Blanch and Bessie, Don Felipe had discreetly refrained from joining them as he had promised; he would make his apologies to them in the evening. The opportunity for which he had been waiting since his return had come — he must see Chiquita alone. So he withdrew to a far corner of the garden, where he could observe the women without being seen, and when Blanch and Bessie returned to the house, he intercepted her. Although she had hourly expected to meet him ever since she had been apprised of his return, his appearance was so sudden she was taken unawares. She had reseated herself after Blanch and Bessie left and sat leaning with one elbow on the table and her head resting in her hand, lost in thought. She did

not hear his approach from behind, but at the first sound of his voice she started to her feet, turning like a flash and facing him. Her movement was so sudden and unexpected that he too was taken aback.

"You evidently did not expect to see me this afternoon," he began with some hesitancy.

"I did not," she replied coldly. "I should have thought," she continued, looking him full in the eyes, "that the manhood in you would have forever prevented your return." Felipe winced under her words. A dark flush of anger suffused his face, and his lips quivered in an effort to frame the hot words he was about to utter in reply, but he checked himself.

"One is sometimes forced to follow the bidding of an instinct or desire even against one's will," he said, controlling himself with difficulty. She drew her glove on her right hand without replying and took a step in the direction of the *patio*, as though to depart.

"Chiquita!" he exclaimed, stepping quickly in front of her and barring her way, "I have tried my best to remain away, but in spite of myself, I've been drawn irresistibly back to you — I could not help it. Besides," he added, "you must realize what it costs me."

"Better had you spared yourself the humiliation, Don Felipe," she answered.

"Listen, Chiquita, to what I have to say!"

"Spare yourself the pain, Don Felipe Ramirez. Nothing you can say can alter my attitude toward you," she interrupted.

"You must hear what I have to say!" he cried passionately, without heeding her impatience. "Ever since

we parted, I have done nothing but travel, travel, over the face of the earth, in the vain hope of forgetting you. And if, during that time, I have committed excesses, it was the love of you that drove me to it in order that I might efface you from my memory forever. But, as you see, I cannot do it, and — I have come back again." It was easy to read the agony in his heart, divine the suffering which his humiliation caused him, and yet his words did not move her; not an atom of pity did they arouse within her, knowing as she did the arrogant, selfish being that he was.

"Chiquita, I love you still!" he burst forth.

"How dare you speak of love to me?" she cried. "Have you forgotten Pepita Delaguerra, whom you ruined, for whose death you are responsible? You laughed and went on your way; she was only a flower to be broken and tossed aside. Well, I've not forgotten the day on which I found her alone and deserted, nor the hour of her death."

"Chiquita," he interrupted, "if suffering can atone for that misdeed —"

"Ah! not so fast, Don Felipe Ramirez," she answered, cutting him short. "Let us understand one another once and for all! She forgave you with her dying breath, but as I knelt over her dead body, I vowed that if ever you crossed my path and made advances to me that, as sure as there's a God in heaven, I would encourage you, lead you on until you were mad, and then fling you from me like the dog that you are in order that you, too, might learn what it is to live without the one you love!"

Had she spat in his face, she could not have aroused the tiger in him more effectually.

"Chiquita!" he cried, gasping, his face livid with rage, "you're a devil!"

"No, I'm only a woman who had the courage to avenge another woman's wrong," she answered quietly. "Don't imagine that a wrong committed can ever be atoned for. It may be condoned by the world, or even forgiven by the one who was wronged, but that is all; the deed stands forever written against one." She watched him as he paced back and forth with clenched hands and teeth, his face ashen, his lips quivering, his whole being convulsed with emotion and remorse. For some minutes he was quite unable to speak, the longing to scream and seize her by the throat and throttle her was so overpowering.

"I understand," he said at length, in the calmest tone he could command, "you love Captain Forest; you think to marry him."

"That's no concern of yours!" she retorted, hotly.

"Listen, Chiquita," he said, fiercely. "The cold blood that flows in his veins can never satisfy the warm passion of the South — a woman of your nature. I am richer than he is; I can strew your path with gold. I will make amends for the past; I was young, then. My one desire in life will be to fulfill your slightest wish, to live for your happiness only. Any sacrifice you name, I will make. I will make over my entire fortune to you if you will consent to our marriage."

"It makes me sick to hear you talk of love and marriage," she answered. "Your idea of love is solely that

of possession. What sort of love could one like you give me in comparison to his?"

"Ah! you do love him! But you will never marry him," he retorted furiously. "If I do not possess you, no one else shall!"

"Ah! you will kill me, perhaps?" she said, divining his thought. "Well, then, be it so! What greater felicity could there be for me than to die in the knowledge that he loves me — perhaps in his arms?" She drew back a pace and placing both hands on her breast, said: "Strike, Don Felipe, when and where the moment pleases you best!"

"Ha! ha! ha!" he laughed. "How could you take me to be so simple, so foolish? Oh, no, Señorita, not until the hour that you have exchanged vows and, intoxicated by love's first kiss, he presses you to his heart, then — then, Señorita, will I lay him dead at your feet in order that you also may realize what it is to live without the one you love," he said with a sneer, a faint smile wreathing his cruel lips as he watched the effect his words had upon her. There was a malicious gleam of exultation in his eyes as he saw her draw herself together suddenly and shudder as though struck by a knife.

"What say you to that, Señorita?" and he laughed in her face.

"What, dead at my feet? Such a one as you come between me and my happiness?" The rich red bronze of her face faded to a livid hue, almost white in its intensity. A strange, terrible light came into her eyes and, as she glided close up to him, he recoiled from

her in terror as though from a panther about to spring. Don Felipe had never stood so near to death before. She halted and raised her right hand as if to strike him across the face, then paused and lowered it.

"Don Felipe Ramirez," she hissed in an almost inaudible voice, "if you so much as harm a hair of his head, I'll tear you limb from limb!"

"Bah!" he replied, recovering his equilibrium. "Do you think I fear a woman?"

"Don Felipe," she began slowly, controlling with effort the violent emotions that swept over her, "it is no idle boast if I remind you that no one in Chihuahua shoots better than I do."

"Ha!" he laughed, snapping his fingers. "You think to kill me?"

"And if I did," she replied slowly, her voice vibrant with passion, "you would not be the first man I have killed, Don Felipe Ramirez. And what's more, if it comes to a question of you or him, I'll kill you as I would a snake or sage-rabbit." He started. He began to see her in a new light. With her subtle wit, her grace and alluring beauty, she was far more dangerous than a man; but he was not intimidated. Craven though his soul might be, he could not be accused of cowardice in the face of danger. Besides, what had he to live for? Better be dead than forced to live without her.

"Hearken, Don Felipe Ramirez," she continued calmly, her eyes riveted on his face. "I have ridden many times in battle by the side of my father before his death. The last time came very near being my end; it was when the Government sent troops against my

people, and we were surrounded in the hills. That day my horse was killed under me twice. All day long we fought and charged the enemy's lines, but to no avail — we could not break them. The young officer in command of the Government's troops not only outgeneraled all our maneuvers, but his life seemed charmed, for, fire at him as often as we liked, we could not hit him. Finally realizing that there was no hope of escape so long as he remained in command, I rode forth alone between the lines and challenged him to single combat. He accepted the challenge, but when he drew near and saw that I was a woman, he refused to fight, for he was gallant as he was brave. But I was too quick for him; I forced him to fight. His bullet went through my shoulder, mine through his heart." She paused for an instant, then resumed. "So, just as we that day passed over that brave young officer's body, so shall I pass over yours, Don Felipe Ramirez, if you persist in standing in my way."

For the first time he saw her in her true light — the Amazon, the woman who had been trained to fight as men fight, and who had fought shoulder to shoulder with men. He was silent. Never had she appeared so beautiful, so terrible, so alluring and irresistible as during her recital. The hour had come; the circle of death had closed about them, and he knew now for a certainty that it meant either his life or hers; that there was no longer any hope of a reconciliation, no longer room for them both in this life.

"Do you imagine that I fear the threats of a woman?" he said at last, in the same sneering tone as

before, in which she, too, read his unmistakable answer.

"You have been warned," she answered quietly, and giving him a last searching look, she turned and left him abruptly. Had ever mortal drunk deeper of the cup of humiliation than he? The sound of her footsteps and tinkle of her spurs died away along the pathway as she disappeared around the corner of the house. He noted that she carried herself as erect as ever; every movement bespoke the unconquerable pride of her race. God! how he hated her! What would he not give to break that pride — that pride which seemed to enable her to surmount every obstacle. It was not enough to kill Captain Forest. No, she must be broken completely, humiliated in the eyes of the world, humbled to the dust as he had been humbled; nothing short of that could satisfy him now. But how, how was her ruin to be accomplished? he asked himself as he paced back and forth, almost suffocating with rage. Suddenly an idea flashed through his mind, causing him to stop short.

"Ah!" he cried aloud, "why did she dance; why has she concealed her motive so carefully from the world? It must be the clew to some mystery in her life! God! if I could but learn the reason —"

"What would Don Felipe Ramirez give to know?" came a voice from behind him, causing him to start and turn around just in time to see Juan emerge from the lilac bushes.

"Juan Ramon!" he exclaimed.

"Aye, *Caballero!*" replied Juan lightly, raising his *sombrero* as he advanced.

"What do you know?" asked Felipe, half contemptuously, regarding him with keen, searching eyes.

"Don't worry about what I know; leave that to me for the present," answered Juan, his peculiarly cold smile lighting up his face. "But what will you give to know, Don Felipe Ramirez?" he continued, with the keen air of the tradesman who beholds a sure customer before him and is determined to drive a sharp bargain.

"What will I give?" repeated Felipe, slowly, relapsing into thought. For some time he was silent, during which he regarded Juan's features intently, as if to assure himself of the latter's good faith. Then suddenly and impetuously he cried: "I'll tell you, Juan Ramon! I'll give you gold enough to keep you drunk and your mistress clothed in silks and satins for the rest of your days! Aye, the finest pair of horses in all Mexico shall draw your carriage, and you shall have money to gamble."

"Then have patience for but a little while longer, Don Felipe Ramirez," replied Juan, rubbing the palms of his long, slim hands together, as though he already felt the magic touch of the gold and heard its musical clink in his ears.

"I hear that fortune has played you false of late, Juan Ramon," said Felipe.

"'Tis the very devil, Señor!" answered Juan with an oath.

"Here, take this," continued Felipe, handing him a roll of bank notes which he drew from his pocket. "You shall have as many men and horses to assist you in the work as you want," he added.

"Horses I will need, but no men, Don Felipe," replied Juan, jubilant over the return of fortune. The bargain was better than he had anticipated.

XXI

DICK YANKTON had taken on a new lease of life. He no longer walked — he flew. Like Hermes of old his feet seemed to have become suddenly endowed with wings, with the result that his head was coming into dangerous proximity to the clouds.

"*Dios!* what had come over Señor Dick, who was on the best of terms with every man, woman and child and dog in Santa Fé?" So potent was the draught which he had imbibed, that he appeared to have been stricken suddenly with blindness and the loss of memory at one and the same instant. The salutations of his friends and acquaintances who greeted him when he walked abroad were left unnoticed; his gaze fixed dreamily on space before him. What had happened? Had he come into possession of a new mine, or was he engaged in locating one through means of that psychic sense or inner vision of the seer which he seemed to possess? Had the real cause of his perturbation been guessed — that a woman's smile had suddenly opened heaven's gates to him, a ripple of laughter would have gone the rounds of Santa Fé. The mere suggestion that the Señor Dick could be seriously in love was too absurd; his friends were too well acquainted with the flirtatious side of his nature ever to credit such a possibility. And yet, when Anita, his Indian housekeeper and wife of his overseer

and general factotum, Concho, saw the amazing quantities of flowers, still wet with the morning's dew, that were daily transported to the *Posada*, her suspicions became aroused. She began to question Concho concerning them, and when he finally admitted that a woman was the recipient of them, she raised her eyebrows with the knowing look of a woman who has guessed the truth.

"I thought so," she answered quietly, a peculiar smile illumining her dark countenance as she seated herself in the doorway of the refectory which opened on the *patio*, and disposed herself comfortably, preparatory to the interesting bit of gossip which she intended to screw out of her husband.

She was of medium height, of the spare, slender type, and must have been attractive in her youth, for even now, in spite of middle age, she was comely to look upon. She wore a red rose in her black hair, while a partially drooping eyelid gave a piquant, coquettish expression to her face.

"Holy Virgin! but this is interesting!" she went on after a pause. "The Señor in love, really in love!" and she laughed quietly to herself, while she took a pinch of tobacco and a leaf of brown paper from the pocket of her apron and began rolling a cigarette.

"Bah!" said Concho, accompanying the exclamation with a shrug of the shoulders. "You women are always imagining things which do not exist. Have we not often seen the Señor like this before? Has he not completely spoiled the Señoritas of the town with his flowers? He's bored. He's trying to amuse himself, that's all."

"And didst thou not say," continued Anita, without heeding his remarks, regarding him out of the corners of her eyes while lighting her cigarette, "that she is not quite so tall as the other one, but equally beautiful in her way; that she is pink and white at one and the same moment, just like a half-blown rose, and soft and satiny as the down on a swan's neck?"

"It is all true, Anita *mia*, she is even that and more!" responded Concho with warmth. "She is worth a journey to the *Posada* to see, but then, what is that — what are a few wisps of flowers?"

"Wisps? Armfuls, thou meanest, Concho! When did the Señor ever lavish so many flowers upon one woman before? He told me they were for the hospital," she chuckled, "but I have always been able to tell whether the Señor was speaking the truth or not. Thou knowest the way he has of saying the opposite to that which he means," and she blew a ring of smoke into the still air and watched it as it floated upwards.

"Concho," she said after some moments' reflection, "thou art a fool! I always said thou wert, and now I know it. The hospital — bah! How could he have ever thought me so simple?" she exclaimed in a tone of mingled sarcasm and disgust. "I tell thee, Concho, all women are the same either on this side of the world or the other. The one thou hast just described to me is the most dangerous of all women for a man like the Señor to meet. That is, if she is clever," she added. "But have we not all heard how clever and beautiful the Americana Señoritas are?"

"Aye, there is nothing to compare with them in the

whole land, with the exception of the Chiquita, of course," replied Concho.

"Exactly; just what I have been saying, Concho *mio*," Anita went on, surveying her spouse with a look of pitying superiority. "Why, only yesterday, when he was here, I knew instantly by his air of distraction that something unusual had happened. Never has he been so particular before. He went all over the place, inspecting everything to the minutest detail, just like a woman. Nothing pleased him; and when he came to the flowers, which everybody knows are the finest in all Chihuahua, he declared they were not fit for a dog to sniff at, and rated the gardeners soundly for their negligence.

"Ah!" she sighed, the expression of her countenance softening, "the place needs a mistress badly — it is the one thing it lacks. There was a time when I hoped it might be the Chiquita, but since fate has ordained that it should be otherwise, let us pray that it may be this one. In fact," she exclaimed, looking up and emphasizing her words, "from what thou hast told me of her, I know it will be she or none, and may heaven grant that it please the Saints either to give her to him or protect him from her, for the Señor is a man who can really love but once. Take a woman's word for it, Concho, these are the true symptoms of love." Having delivered herself thus forcibly, she tossed aside the end of her cigarette and rose from the doorsill.

"Thou wert always a fool, Concho," she added, regarding him compassionately with a smile and patting him on the cheek. Then turning, she disappeared in the

house, leaving Concho to marvel at her astuteness, a thing he had never suspected.

Meanwhile, the subject under discussion was pacing the floor of his room in the *Posada* like a caged lion. For one whole week Bessie Van Ashton had seemingly thrown wide the portals of her heart and bade him enter, a privilege of which he was not slow to avail himself. Never had woman flirted to better advantage or succeeded more effectually in turning a man's head in so short a time as had this distracting, fair-haired witch. The only regret experienced by Mr. Yankton during these hours of unalloyed happiness, was the thought of the days he had lost — days which might have been spent in her society had he only known. How blind he had been not to have recognized her the instant he had set eyes on her, instead of compelling the Almighty to remind him that she was the woman that had been reserved for him by dropping her down out of a clear sky into his arms! How stupid of him, and how patient Providence was with some of us at times!

During the few short days which followed that happy accident — days that seemed like so many swift, fleeting seconds, Dick floated on a summer sea whose surface was unmarred by shadow or ripple. All the world had changed. He felt as though he had only just begun to live, and he spun a golden web of fancies out of the reality of things which, for one so deeply versed in the game of life, was a marvel of beauty, fair as a poet's dream, yet more substantial. And why not? Had not his life been one replete with adventure and romance from the cradle? His meeting with Bessie was no more

remarkable than many other things that had occurred during his lifetime. It was now perfectly clear to him why he had built the *hacienda* in the face of adverse judgment. It was for her, of course. A place in which to enshrine and worship her during the years to come; for what else could it be?

That insane notion of a white-haired patriarch enjoying the solitude of the place was too absurd — a morbid fancy born of loneliness and melancholy. The walk back to the *Posada* on the day of their startling encounter and the hours spent in Bessie's society since then — strolling and chatting in the garden, or going for long rides over the plains together, had convinced him it was not intended that man should live alone. He had taken good care that she should learn nothing of the existence of the *hacienda* or of his wealth, and as little as possible concerning himself, except that he was an agreeable young man with fair prospects; and thus far, thanks to the Captain's silence and her ignorance of Spanish, he had succeeded admirably.

Fair prospects! The secret was almost too good to keep, and he laughed softly to himself as he mused upon it. It was truly an inspiration; just the sort of thing to hand out to one of Newport's smart-set. Although he had not yet proposed to her, he regarded their marriage as a foregone conclusion; an event of the near future. She certainly had led him to infer as much, and the plan he had conceived regarding it was highly ingenious — one worthy of his fertile imagination. Directly they were married, they would spend the first fortnight of their honeymoon camping in the mountains

in a style worthy of a grand Mogul, after which he would suggest that they pass the night at a near-by *rancho* belonging to a friend, and in this wise introduce her to her future home.

The rapture of the picture fairly dazzled him, and he lay awake whole nights contemplating it — the *patio* palely illumined by the moonlight, the murmur of the fountain in its center, the perfume of flowers, the melodious voices of the dark-skinned Indian attendants, bearing flaming torches, and chanting the time-honored welcome to their new mistress, and her insistent demands to be introduced to their host; and then the delightful dénouement, the surprise she must experience when the truth finally dawned upon her. Truly poet never dreamed a fairer dream. It had taken him a whole week to conceive the idea in detail, and on the morning of the seventh day on which he had decided to ask her to become his wife, he stood with the horses before the *Posada* expectantly awaiting her appearance to take the ride they had agreed upon the night before. At the end of an hour, during which he fretted over the undue delay with the same impatience as did the horses, Rosita appeared and informed him that the Señorita Van Ashton would not ride that morning; she was not feeling well. A wild alarm seized him. The thought that she might have been stricken suddenly with some serious illness, quite unnerved him for the moment. "*Caramba!*" he cried, quite forgetting his English. "What has happened? Is it serious? Is anything being done?" But all inquiries concerning the actual state of the Señorita's health proving fruitless, he was left to pass

the remainder of the day wandering aimlessly about the garden in the vain hope of finding something to divert his mind. Had he been in possession of his usual calm, he might have noticed the amused expression on Rosita's face, but the extent of one's concern being the measure of one's love for a person, he saw only the vivid mental picture of his consuming passion, Bessie, suffering Bessie!

It was the first jarring note in that state of uninterrupted bliss which he had been enjoying, and as the day wore painfully on he began to realize how much she had become to him. He was haunted by misgivings, and finally, late in the afternoon, having convinced himself that he had exhausted the resources of the garden, he decided to pass the time until the dinner hour upon the veranda on the other side of the house. Thither he repaired, but oddly enough and greatly to his astonishment, as he stepped out upon the veranda, he came face to face with Miss Van Ashton returning from a walk in the town. She was charmingly gowned in a soft, clinging creation of pale lavender and white lace, with long white suède gloves and low lavender shoes and silk stockings, an inch or so of which she flashed before his eyes, proclaiming the society belle's prerogative. She carried a parasol of the same color and material as her dress, while her head was crowned with a sweeping, rakishly plumed Rembrandtesque hat worn at a killing angle. The gold in her hair and the exquisite pink and white of her throat and cheeks blended perfectly with a color scheme, the attractiveness of which was greatly enhanced by her natural charm

and the delicate scent of lavender and rose leaves which emanated from her person, the combined effects of which were not lost upon an over-wrought imagination.

To use the current vernacular of the times, so familiar to the world in which she moved, Miss Van Ashton's appearance was decidedly fetching, and strongly suggestive of the things of which poets, in their madness, are continually harping — flower gardens flooded with moonlight and the song of nightingales. Although not modeled on heroic lines, she nevertheless possessed the qualifications which most men seek in women and therefore became quite as formidable as Delilah when she chose to assert herself. To say that Mr. Yankton was dazzled but mildly expresses his feelings; he was ravished, though in no mood for banter. Had their meeting occurred under more auspicious circumstances, he undoubtedly would have complimented her on her charming appearance; but for one who had been eating his heart out during eight consecutive hours solely on her account, it was hardly to be expected. The sight of her, though a relief to his mind, gave rise to thoughts the nature of which he found it difficult to conceal.

"What!" he cried, furious and aghast, scarcely believing his eyes as the truth slowly began to dawn upon him. "They told me you were ill — that you couldn't appear to-day!"

"Ill? How very strange!" she answered in feigned surprise, with a far away, vacant look in her eyes, as though she had just met him for the first time, rendering him quite speechless. "Really, Mr. Yankton," she

continued in the coldest, most distant manner she could command, "I never felt better in my life!" And without allowing him time to catch his breath, she passed by him and slammed the door in his face, from the other side of which he fancied he heard her silvery, rippling laughter, the nature of which sounded suspiciously like a titter.

Woman never delivered a more crushing blow. In that instant Mr. Yankton saw more stars than the firmament contains. It was like being thrown suddenly into a river on a cold morning. Miss Van Ashton's methods might be regarded as somewhat harsh by certain persons, but realizing that heroic measures were the only cure for the dangerous distemper that threatened her peace of mind, she had acted without hesitancy. Besides, was she not in a measure justified in wishing to even up their scores?

Oh, the fickleness of woman! How cleverly she had deceived him, and what an ass he had been! She had been playing with him all the while, and as he paced the floor, revolving what course to pursue, he wondered how he could have been so simple. True, she was different from any woman he had ever met, but dazed though he was by her sudden change of front, he was not disheartened. On the contrary, she had become more attractive than ever. His blood fairly boiled at the thought of his defeat, but he would profit by the experience — change his tactics completely. The more she avoided him, the more persistent he would become. If she did not see him, she would be kept a prisoner in the house. He would give her no peace, day

or night. He would dog her footsteps, confront her at every turn, pursue her with the most reckless and relentless ardor and utter disregard of what the world might think; treat her as he would an unbroken horse — give her no rest, but keep her on the jump until he had worn her out, and then close with her.

XXII

THE situation was becoming intolerable. Something must be done and done at once to clear the atmosphere. Captain Forest's apparent indifference to all things, including herself, aroused Blanch to a pitch of exasperation which might best be likened to that of a high-strung, thoroughbred horse that has been ignominiously hitched to a plow and compelled to drag it. At the end of a week he either drops dead in the furrow or becomes a broken-spirited hack for the rest of his days.

Nothing short of love or hatred could satisfy her. It was a new experience. Never had she suffered such ignominy. It was like being coerced. One could respect an enemy, but this exasperating indifference was unendurable. The more she thought of it, the more convinced she became that it was just such an antagonistic attitude which had prompted the beautiful, though wicked Borgia, to administer certain love potions to numerous unappreciative gallants. Deliberate, cold-blooded murder committed under such extenuating circumstances began to appear more in the light of justice than of crime.

Captain Forest offered an entirely new front. Not that he had changed so much, she knew better than that, but she marveled at his self-control. The dash

and spirit of the soldier, which every one admired so much in him, had given way to the most insulting, good-humored complacency; the frame of mind one looks for in an aged sinner whose terror of an uncertain future has driven him to prepare for heaven. She knew well enough that his attitude was assumed for a purpose only, until he had made up his mind what to do; waiting to make up his mind as to which of them, she or Chiquita, was preferable. This, of course, was merely a jealous supposition on her part.

She had hoped to arouse his jealousy, or, failing in that, at least his enthusiasm. Thus far she had failed to accomplish either and she could not understand it. Surely he was flesh and blood like other men, yet nothing seemed to move him. He appeared like one at peace with all the world, calm and serene as a summer's day, and smoked incessantly. She could endure it no longer. The depression from which she suffered was crushing her slowly and irresistibly to earth. She was at her wits' end to know what to do to relieve the tension, until she finally hit upon the idea of giving an old-fashioned Spanish *fandango* — a *fiesta.*

The thought was a happy one. It was not only one of those things she had always wanted to see, but it would be a break — something to relieve the strain of her daily existence; she pursuing, he avoiding her. The novelty of the scene — the bright, gay costumes of the Mexicans, music and twinkling lights, dancing and wine and laughter and song, and the stars overhead, mellowed by the light of the full moon, must infuse new life into them all — recall memories of other days

to him. With such a setting, a woman of her beauty, refinement and attraction, and an adept at the game of flattery and intrigue, must shine with new luster — become doubly dangerous and irresistible to a man. Though this was her chief motive for giving the *fiesta*, she had still another in view.

The fame of Chiquita's dancing had naturally aroused her curiosity. She would ask her to dance; not that she believed the half of what she heard concerning it, but it would be a satisfaction to see it. Besides, she had a certain motive of her own for so doing which she imparted to no one; the subtlest of a woman's thoughts which only the intuition of a woman could have prompted. She laughed to herself at the thought which invariably aroused within her a feeling akin to triumph. Why had she not thought of it before? She knew the Captain had already seen her dance, but then that was before he knew who she was. It had been in a theater, and his enthusiasm must have been prompted in a measure by that of the audience about him. The emotion of a large assembly was always contagious — sweeping the individual along with it. Whereas, in private, her dancing, lacking the glamour and artificiality of the stage, would be a very different thing. It would appear in a more realistic, commonplace light. Any faults which the atmosphere of the stage might have concealed would immediately become apparent in the light of natural surroundings and her performance sink to the level of the commonplace.

Her dancing could only be amateurish at its best, for where could she possibly have learned to dance?

What instruction could she, living in this out-of-the-way corner of the world, have received in the art? As for local enthusiasm, it counted for little — amateurs were always so popular at home. And after all was said, what did the achievements of the great dancers really amount to? Their creations were not ranked with those of other artistic achievements. In fact, dancing could scarcely be ranked with the legitimate branches of art at all. At its best, it was only a pastime; something to amuse. This, of course, was the light in which she viewed one of the greatest arts which few ever succeed in mastering. Possibly because the world has really seen no dancing to speak of since the days of the great Taglioni, until the Pavlowa appeared. Even parts of the latter's art were questionable, but then, she was the Pavlowa!

Chiquita's dancing differed from anything Captain Forest had ever seen. As a matter of fact, much of it would not have been called dancing at all by many people, so different has the modern conception of the art become since the days of the ancients. But where had she received her instruction? The ability to dance, like any other talent, is born in one, not acquired. True, it must be developed through constant practice just like any other talent, if ever it is to amount to anything; but even then, great dancers are born just as great painters, poets and musicians are born.

The Indian's greatest pastime and amusement is dancing, and Chiquita had danced almost daily from earliest childhood to her sixteenth year when fate had led her to Padre Antonio's door. Then she went to

the City of Mexico and also had visited Europe. In both places she had had the opportunity of seeing some of the greatest dancers of the day and was able to draw comparisons between their conceptions of the art and hers. But when she began the study of ancient history her attention was called to the Greeks' conception of the art, and she soon discovered that modern dancing was a direct violation of that which was most plastic in art, and consisted chiefly of contortions, high kicking and pirouetting on the toes. She also discovered that the conceptions of her own people regarding the art stood nearer that of the ancients than did modern man's. To her it was an interesting discovery. It was as natural for her to dance as to breathe, and from that hour she began to study and practice the art with renewed interest.

Shortly after her admittance to the convent, it was also discovered that she possessed a voice of unusual quality and range; and, as Padre Antonio had instructed the Sisters to do their utmost to develop any natural talent she might possess to a marked degree, the best teacher in voice culture which the city afforded was procured for her. These were Padre Antonio's wishes and they had been obeyed conscientiously by the Sisters who recognized Chiquita's strong dramatic ability.

The years passed, and, as the day finally arrived on which she was to leave school, the performances which marked the closing exercises were given as usual by the pupils. The last number on the programme represented an ancient Greek festival arranged by Padre Alesandro,

the instructor in classic literature, in which Chiquita took the leading part, and in which, at her request, she was permitted to introduce a dance of her own creation. Among the many guests that had been invited to attend the closing ceremonies was one Signor Tosti, a ballet-master, who at the time was visiting the Capitol with an Italian opera company. A friend whose daughter took part in the exercises had persuaded him, much against his will, to attend; for what possible interest could a veteran of the ballet take in such amateurish exhibitions?

Touring the world with a troup of quarrelsome artists was arduous work for a tired old gentleman at its best. So, like the sensible man that he was, he promptly went to sleep at the opening of the performance and probably would have slept through the entire evening, had he not been aroused from his slumbers in the midst of the last number on the programme by the sound of a glorious voice — a deep mezzo-soprano of the richest contralto quality. Opening his eyes, he saw an assembly of beautifully clad, flower-bedecked Grecian youths and maidens drawn up across the back of the stage, chanting the chorus, and in their midst, in the foreground, one of the most beautiful women he had ever seen. He drew himself up with a start and rubbed his eyes to assure himself that he was really awake. And then, considering the occasion and the time and the place, he witnessed a performance that fairly took his breath away.

His Southern temperament became thoroughly aroused, and at the conclusion of the dance, he sud-

denly rose from his seat and without waiting for an introduction, rushed to the stage and springing upon it, bowed low before Chiquita and seizing her hand, kissed it in view of the audience. No one knew better than he did that, in his profession, a new star had just fallen from heaven to earth. The following day he and the director of his company waited upon Chiquita and offered her any sum she might choose to name if she would consent to join the company and return to Europe with them. But they did not know what Chiquita's past had been — that she was still the Amazon as of old — that the woman who had been trained to battle in her early youth the same as the men of her people had been trained, regarded as mere pastime that which they considered one of the heights of earthly attainment. The woman who at sunrise had listened daily to the song of the Memnon, who had experienced the shock of battle, whose life lived close to nature had taught her the meaning of the ethics of the dust and instilled into her veins the rippling laughter of water and sunshine and the song of the winds, and whose every breath had been the rapturous breath of freedom, viewed life from a different standpoint than that of men debased by centuries of servitude. The world of their creation was trifling in comparison to that of God's which to her was all sufficing and enabled her to look upon their doings with the same equanimity and indulgence as that with which the parent regards the frolicsome gambols of the child.

Twenty years of almost uninterrupted practice had kept her body and limbs supple and pliant, but this Blanch did not know.

XXIII

TRUE to his resolve, Dick rose to the exigency of the occasion by laying stubborn siege to Miss Van Ashton's heart. During the day he bombarded her with flowers and books and bonbons, and gentle but passionate missives; all of which the fair recipient as promptly hurled back into his face. At night relays of musicians serenaded her uninterruptedly until the glowing east announced the coming of a new day. He took the whole household into his confidence, rendering it impossible for her to set foot outside her door without meeting him.

The first day she laughed at his eccentricities; on the second, she grew furious, and on the third, not having closed her eyes for two whole days and nights, she felt herself on the verge of a nervous collapse. There being no rest for any one, Colonel Van Ashton suddenly appeared before his daughter on the morning of the fourth day and gave her to understand that if the infernal nuisance did not cease instantly he would shoot the first person who entered the garden that evening after he had retired. And to back his threat, he displayed a new automatic pistol which he had purchased in the town the day before; the shopkeeper having assured him that, for a running fire, it was the most convenient and effective weapon on the market. The

Colonel was in a reckless mood and seemed in imminent danger of losing in a moment the self-control which years of civilization had instilled within him. Having been literally goaded to madness, little wonder that he too was on the verge of succumbing to the customs of the land, and was beginning to feel a secret longing to shoot and swear and swagger and destroy. Knowing her father to be as good as his word, and to possess the courage of a lion when aroused, Bessie found herself forced to capitulate a day earlier than she otherwise would have, for, incensed though she was, not even a woman of her grit and spirit could possibly have held out much longer under conditions that turned night into day.

It was galling in the extreme to be compelled to surrender so soon, but there being no alternative, she was obliged to accept the humiliation with the best grace possible. Accordingly, she appeared in the garden late on the afternoon of the fourth day where she espied the object of her wrath and annoyance seated comfortably on the grass at the foot of a pear tree, and as usual — smoking. The sight of him was hardly conducive to soothe the feelings of one who inwardly was a seething volcano, and she vowed that she would pay him out to the full before she was done with him.

He seemed greatly surprised by her appearance, and hastily throwing away his cigar, rose to his feet with the intention of speaking to her, but without noticing him, she made her way to the farthest corner of the garden and seated herself in a large rustic chair that

stood in the shadow of the high wall which surrounded the garden. She knew he would not be long in renewing his persecutions. And angry though she was, she could not help wondering at the novelty of the situation. She, Bessie Van Ashton, placed at the mercy of an obscure person, a rustic nobody! Like every other woman, she had dreamed of such a man as this, one that would seize and carry her off; but then the time and place were other than the present, and he resembled more closely the type of man with which she had been familiar all her life. The spirit of antagonism which he aroused was due rather to pique than to dislike, for in spite of his audacity she could not help admiring his spirit.

Her sense of injury was poignantly enhanced by the fact that she recognized herself to be the true cause of her trouble. Had she not led him on this thing might never have happened; and yet, she was neither sorry nor repentant for what she had done. Had any other man dared take the liberties he had taken with her, she would have despised him, but with him, though she was unable to explain it, things were somehow different. She was furious with him for kissing her, and yet deep down in her inner consciousness she was not so certain that she was sorry he had done so. The things he did, which would have branded any other man as a cad, were the very things the man of her dreams might have done under similar circumstances. Yet she shuddered as she daily foresaw the consequences that might ensue should she encourage him further. Flirt-

ing with a man whose high-handed, arbitrary methods dazed rather than offended her, was becoming dangerous.

Self-preservation being always our first thought, she had decided to fly, but the presence of Blanch rendered such a course impossible. The only alternative left her was to extricate herself as swiftly and gracefully as possible from her dilemma by making herself as disagreeable as possible in his eyes. In this wise she hoped to disillusion him, and it was with this intention she had come forth to meet him. She could not see him from where she sat, having turned her back upon him; but, judging from the length of time it took him to approach, she rightly conjectured that he had been walking in a circle, doubtless at a loss what course to pursue. The silence that ensued when he paused behind her was broken only by the sound of his labored breathing and a nervous cough, plainly betraying the embarrassment he felt on finding himself once more in her presence.

"Miss Van Ashton," he said at length, "it is extremely gratifying to know that you have at last decided to leave the oppressive walls of your inhospitable abode for the world of sunshine without, where the essence and being of all things fill one with a desire to live." Nothing he could have said at the moment could have aroused her resentment more than this idiotic speech. She had expected him to eat humble pie, to throw himself at her feet and implore forgiveness; but, no! She sprang to her feet and facing him, turned a pair of beautiful blazing eyes upon him. She was

so furious she choked, and for some moments was quite unable to speak.

"I suppose," she said at last, her voice trembling with suppressed indignation, "that you take pleasure in pursuing a helpless woman like a hunted beast. It's so manly," she added scathingly, looking in vain for some sign of contrition in his face. "Why," she went on, "if a man where I live had done the hundredth part of what you have done, society would shun him as it would a pariah!"

"Or a leper," he added good humoredly, quick to recognize the disadvantage at which the loss of her temper placed her. "They must be a poor lot where you live," he continued. "I think we had better pass them by without further comment." She was suffocated — she could have bitten her tongue off!

"Have you no consideration for others' feelings — for what they might want?" she cried.

"Ah! I see, Miss Van Ashton," he answered, regarding her compassionately. "You quite overlook the true facts of the case. This is not at all a question of what you may want, but of what is best for you. I have merely been trying to tell you in my awkward way that it is not good for one to live alone." She laughed hysterically. The colossal impudence of the man took her breath away. She gasped — attempted to speak, but words failing her, turned her back upon him and began tearing into shreds the end of the silken gauze Indian scarf which she wore over her shoulders.

"Can't you think of what you want, Miss Van Ash-

ton?" he asked gently, in the tone of one addressing a refractory child.

"No!" she screamed, without at all realizing what she was saying. To think that this man was able to play with her like a worm on the end of a pin! It was too much! "How dare you! I — I hate you!" she cried, without turning round and quite beside herself. There was no mistaking her attitude; he had gone far enough. The limit of her endurance had been reached, and he suddenly became serious. Again there was silence between them.

"Miss Van Ashton," he said, drawing himself up, "it really doesn't matter what you or the rest of the world may think of me so long as I can see you. Can you imagine what it would be like if you were never to see the sun again? What could be more absurd than to allow such a trifle as convention to come between you and me? Three feet of wretched adobe wall between me and heaven!" he burst forth. "The idea's preposterous! Why, if you shut yourself up in that miserable hovel again, I'll set fire to the place!" She knew he would.

"Can't you understand," he went on, his voice softening, "that your attitude has aroused the savage, the primeval man in me — that, had I met you here fifty or a hundred years ago, I would have picked you up and quietly carried you away? I know I've been a brute by driving you into the open like this, but that's not me, myself — the man who loves you, who would pass through fire for you, who has dreamed of you and watched and waited through the long years for your

coming; and now that you have come, you surely can't blame me for what I cannot help — for loving you and telling you so in my own way?"

She tried in vain to stifle the emotion his words aroused. She had set out with the intention of wringing this avowal from him in jest, but how differently it affected her now that she heard it. She forgot her anger, everything, in fact, as she listened to the flow of his passion and longed to hear him continue. Every note of his voice thrilled her as it did on the day she first saw him. She remembered that she experienced a peculiar sensation at the time; that his appearance reminded her of the heroic type of manhood which the ancients had sought to depict in their marbles. In him she had unconsciously recognized the true spirit of the Argonaut on whose brow rests the star of empire. She did not idealize him; she simply recognized him for what he was — a man; one in whose soul the sentiment and enthusiasm of youth still sat enthroned, not smothered by the crushing process of modern civilization which was the case with the men she knew. A terror seized her as she compared the latter to him, and beheld how small they appeared beside him.

"Miss Van Ashton," he continued passionately, "you wouldn't thank me if I continued to bandy words with the woman I love, whose presence has become the sunshine of life to me. The whole world has become filled with song since you came into my life. Music and laughter have taken the place of loneliness and despair. Flowers spring from the earth where your feet rest! Don't imagine that you can ever estrange your-

self from me. Wherever you are, by day or by night, waking or dreaming, I also will be there and ever whispering: "Bessie Van Ashton, I love you — you have filled my life so completely I can't live without you!"

Had her face been turned toward him, he would have seen that it was radiant, that her eyes shone with unusual brilliancy, that her hands trembled beneath the folds of her scarf where she had concealed them.

"Bessie, sweet —"

"Stop!" she cried, almost in a voice of terror. "I've not given you permission to speak to me, thus — to call me by name —"

"Then turn round and say you will be human once more! That you will talk and walk and ride again! If you don't, I'll begin all over again by telling you that you are the sweetest —"

"Hush!" she said softly, turning round abruptly with a gesture of protest, looking up into his face, and then down at the ground to conceal her confusion. "I think we understand one another," she said at length, and raising her eyes to his again, she held out both her hands which he seized and held in his own.

"Let us be friends again," she continued, gently withdrawing her hands from his.

"No, don't say that!" he interrupted. "We can't be that! Let it rest as it is!"

XXIV

"WHEN you love, you love," runs a gypsy proverb.

Bessie wore the despairing look of one who clings to a last vain hope. How had it happened? Why had everything gone contrary to her expectations? Why was Mr. Yankton dragging her at the wheels of his chariot instead of she him? According to her social standards he had seen but little, and yet he had the *savoir faire* of a man of the world. Her preconceived ideas on certain subjects were so upset that she no longer appeared to have a hold on anything; the very ground seemed to be slipping away beneath her.

Strange that one could care for the person whom one least expected to, that the most humiliating moment in one's life might be the happiest as well. If any one had suggested such a possibility to her six months previously, she would have laughed at the mere thought. How could she relinquish the life she knew for his? She fought against his influence with all her powers of resistance. And yet, what woman in her right mind would hesitate to follow the man of her choice to the sunlit valleys of our dreams? Weaker women than she had done so and been happy, while stronger ones had hesitated, as was the case with Blanch, and lived to regret it. She secretly prayed that she might be spared

the torture which Blanch was suffering and the despair which must inevitably overtake her should she fail to win back the man she had let slip from her; for what, after all, could life be to one without the true comradeship of love? She began to feel and realize the ineffable sweetness of life's fullness as the days of her awakening continued, while the ache at her heart told her plainly enough that the decisive moment of her life had arrived — that she must choose between happiness and ambition. The one, rich and full though accompanied perhaps by pain and even denial at times; the other fraught with uncertainty.

She understood now the meaning of Chiquita's passionate longing for the man she loved; a thing which the worldliness of the life she had lived hitherto had taught her to be too extravagant to exist anywhere outside of books, but which was true nevertheless. Her intuition told her this in the face of all the world might say to the contrary. As she looked back over the years and thought of her friends, she realized that she like them had submerged her life in the superficial pleasures of the world; but had they filled her cup of happiness? Until now she had not felt the lack of life's crowning joy, for the reason that youth is buoyant and full of hope, and the grand passion had not yet entered into her life. These and a thousand other thoughts ran through her mind that night as she recalled Dick's words.

She could not sleep. From where she lay she could see the moonlight in the *patio* and hear the murmur of the fountain in its center. The night seemed to beckon and whisper to her to come outside. So she arose and

silently dressed herself in the dimly moonlit room without disturbing Blanch, who murmured incoherently in her sleep of the things she was thinking of. She slipped noiselessly through the low window to the *patio* without and stealthily made her way in the shadow of the overhanging arcades to the garden beyond.

The hour was late — close on to dawn. The silvery half-moon hung low in the west accompanied by great cohorts of stars that shone with a brilliancy she had never before seen, and which seemed to be waiting with the moon to usher in the new dawn. All was silence and mystery — all earthly ties seemed severed. Under the cover of the night all things seemed equal. There were no high, no low, no eyes to see, no ears to hear, no towns, no cities, no conventions. All things that hold and bind us had slipped away into the shadows and she seemed to breathe again the primeval freshness of life.

She knew that she must decide between Dick and her family. Her father had given her plainly to understand as much, and this she knew meant the loss of her fortune — the giving up of all for him. Her father threatened, raged and fumed with the petulance of a spoiled child, his paternal displeasure taking that uncompromising form of obstinacy with which the world has long been familiar. She was amazed at herself for being able to take his displeasure with so little concern; a thing which, had it occurred at home, would have caused her to pause and reflect and probably would have been the deciding factor in her life. Her removal from the old life and the glimpses of the new had unconsciously wrought a change within her. She began to

see things as they really are when shorn of their glamour. The life she hitherto had known, she realized, was purely a superficial condition, not only foreign to the realities of things, but superfluous to man himself. Never had Captain Forest appeared so sane and her father so superficial as the hour in which she grasped that truth. It is not what the world makes of you, but what you make of yourself that counts, the beauteous, seductive night kept whispering to her. Why, then, if this be true, should the world about her appear so remote? It was not the actual world — the world as it really is that she would be called upon to give up, but merely the world of that particular set of men and women in which she hitherto had moved.

The same earth rolled beneath her feet — the same stars that looked down upon her in the past still glittered in the heavens overhead — the same winds that crept through the garden and sighed among the trees, wafting the spicy, fragrant odors of the flowers into her face, were the same that had fanned her cheek in the past. All things remained practically the same, only the people were different. But could the old interests and friendships and associations compensate her for the loss of the man that had come into her life to remain for the rest of her days whether she chose to keep him or not? These new and perplexing questions she was forced to ask herself for the first time, and she knew that there could be but one answer forthcoming.

Love was knocking at the portals of her heart as it had never knocked before. It had come to her warm and living, deep and subtle and indefinable, leaving noth-

ing to be said or desired. She saw clearly that principle, as the world conceives it, was not involved. Affection recognizes no such principle — only virtuous longing and desire which is a principle in itself — the fulfillment of creation's grandest purpose; and it rested with her to accept this truth or pass it by.

The chill of the early morning caused her to draw her wrap more closely about her shoulders. A deep sigh of relief escaped her as she glanced upwards once more for a last look at the paling stars. How satisfactory it was to know even though the knowledge pained her!

She had entered the garden a girl, she returned to the house a woman, hugging her secret close to her heart.

XXV

SUCCESS had crowned Juan Ramon's efforts. The pretty little *hacienda* of which he had dreamed so long was no longer a vision of the future, but a reality. It was actually in his possession, purchased with a part of the money he had received from Don Felipe for his work. It now only remained for the pretty Rosita to consent to become the mistress of the place and he, Juan Ramon, would bid farewell to the old *Posada* and the gaming-tables forever. This Juan naïvely promised himself as his thoughts dwelt upon the bright picture of domestic felicity which his imagination conjured up before him.

The attractive presence of Rosita was undoubtedly the source of this inspiration which actually led him to believe in the possibility of the sudden and complete reformation of an inveterate gambler whose desire for play was like the toper's insatiable thirst for liquor. And then, there was Captain Forest's horse. Juan had an idea regarding that animal. When everybody's attention was occupied with the festivities during the night of the *fandango*, and he had succeeded in filling José with the proper amount of *aguardiente*, he would slip quietly away with the horse and conceal him at his *hacienda*. *Caramba!* what a horse — the like of which there was not in all Mexico! And Juan Ramon, the

champion *vaquero* of Chihuahua, was the man to ride him! And he rolled and smoked innumerable *cigarillos* as he sauntered about the garden and corrals, or lounged in the *patio*, musing on these and many other things.

To say that Don Felipe was elated by what he had discovered but mildly describes his state of exultation. At last the woman who had ruined his life was in his power. Not for years had he experienced such delicious transports of rapture. How sweet a thing is revenge! He was like one born anew. The expression of melancholy faded from his countenance, his eyes shone with renewed luster and he smiled upon all the world. There was no more escape for her than there had been for him when she so treacherously thrust the knife into his heart. What he had discovered was different from anything his imagination had pictured in connection with her. Nothing could be more compromising, and the marvel of it was that she had been able to keep the facts concealed from the world so long. Only a woman could have done it, and only the cleverest of women at that. No wonder she had danced in public. She had reason to!

Never had he dreamed that he would live to enjoy this hour. When he first imparted his information to Blanch, she refused to believe it; but the proofs were too convincing to leave so much as the shadow of a doubt in her mind. How fortunate that he had discovered her secret at this time; just before the *fandango*. What an opportunity to confront her with the truth; force her to make a public confession of her guilt.

Nothing could be more propitious for the execution of his plans; the annihilation of the woman who had wrecked his life. It was not enough that she should be exposed. She must be humiliated publicly as he had been.

He did not entirely reveal his plans to Blanch, knowing that the woman in her and her consideration for the Captain would cause her to shrink from inflicting so cruel a revenge even upon a rival. He was far too clever for that. So, without going into details concerning his plans, he led her to believe that, at a prearranged signal from her, he would confront Chiquita personally and compel her to acknowledge the truth before himself and the Captain. Her nature revolted at that which Don Felipe told her, cried out for justice, for the exposure of the impostor; nevertheless, she disliked a scene, and for the Captain's sake, made Don Felipe promise to do nothing unless she gave the signal.

One week hence and their scores would be even. The thought thrilled him as he paced the length of his room, his hands clasping and unclasping nervously behind his back; his mind actively engaged in rehearsing the events of the last few days which led to the discovery, and the details of the plan he had formulated, the carrying out of which was to be deferred until that eventful evening when the principal families of the town and neighborhood, her friends and acquaintances, would be gathered together to witness her shame — the same as they had witnessed his. Her disgrace would be far *worse* than his had been. She would be an outcast;

for let a man transgress and the world may forgive him, but let a woman fall and she is damned forever so far as the world is concerned. He would make no mistake this time. He carefully weighed every detail of his plan, considered every eventuality that might arise. Subtle and resourceful though he knew her to be, there would be no loophole of escape for her.

It was almost too good to be true. He was beside himself. He talked and laughed aloud repeatedly when alone, scarcely able to retain himself, so rapturously sweet was the thought of her humiliation. Suddenly a new thought flashed through his mind. He had sworn that he would kill Captain Forest — lay him dead at her feet; but that, thanks to circumstances, would not now be necessary. The thought of killing a man in cold blood was not pleasant even to one of Don Felipe's temperament in his present state of mind. But should circumstances compel him to do so to complete his revenge, he would stop at nothing, let the consequences be what they might.

That he had received his just deserts for his betrayal of a woman, did not enter his thoughts. Had he not atoned for that misdeed through years of suffering? Had ever mortal been humiliated as he had been? That fact alone decided him. The memory of his transgression had been effaced long since by his intense longing for revenge. Nothing short of revenge could satisfy him now.

A grim smile lit up his countenance as he pondered upon what he knew. And yet, he reflected, who could tell? Infatuation might blind the Captain to the truth.

It was best to be prepared for all emergencies. Stepping to his dresser, he opened the top drawer from which he took a knife which lay concealed beneath the numerous articles it contained. Drawing the blade from its leathern sheath, he ran his thumb lightly over its double edge to assure himself that it had lost none of its keenness. He always carried a pistol, but considering the circumstances a knife would be better. It would make no noise, create less disturbance. It would be so easy, in some secluded part of the garden, to thrust it home and get away quietly before the deed was discovered. One quick thrust, a stifled cry, that would be all. As a youth he could have placed that blade at ten paces in the center of a mark no larger than a silver dollar at every cast. But he had no thought of employing such a method now even if he were able to. Striking the Captain would be like sinking the blade in Chiquita's heart; for did he not hate the Captain, because she loved him, almost as much as he hated her? No, he would not forego that exquisite sense of pleasure and satisfaction, born of jealousy and his insatiable thirst for revenge.

For some time he toyed absently with the knife. Then, from sheer exuberance of spirits, he began tossing it aloft; watching with sparkling eyes the glittering blade as it turned over and over in the air and catching it deftly by the hilt in his right hand as it descended. His hand and wrist were firm and supple as of old; they had lost none of their vigor during the long years he had wandered aimlessly about the world.

Again that cold smile, cruel and cutting as the edge of his knife, lit up his face as he at length sheathed the blade in its leathern case and returned it to its resting place in the drawer of his dresser.

XXVI

CONVICTION is one thing, decision another. Any one who has been taught from earliest childhood to regard black as white could hardly be expected to distinguish in a moment the virtue of the latter.

Daily Bessie resolved to follow the promptings of her heart; usually at the close of the day when the cool of the evening set in, when the stars again took up their procession across the heavens and she walked and chatted with Dick in the garden. But when morning dawned and she thought of her father's awful prognostications and the dire consequences which must inevitably ensue should she take the step, her ardor cooled and she as often changed her mind. Her father spent hours arguing with her, trying to impress her with the importance of the duty she owed society which consisted in obeying to the letter the behests of the set in which she had always moved.

Greatly to the Colonel's astonishment and disgust, his daughter seemed strangely lacking in this particular moral quality. How had her insight become so obtuse? He could not understand it, especially as he had taken particular pains while bringing her up to steel her heart against the insidious longings of maudlin sentiment and to teach her to despise everything outside of her particular world. He and his wife had not regarded love

the chief essential to marriage, so why should his daughter? That she, under the circumstances, should hesitate between happiness and a life of regret, was a thing unique, almost incomprehensible to him. That she should question his authority, his right to choose for her, and his superior knowledge of the world, was still more surprising. Her disaffection was strongly suggestive of disrespect, a lack of faith in his infallibility in which he, the Colonel, firmly believed, if nobody else did.

The thought that the efforts of years might come to naught was bitter as wormwood to him. It was bad enough that his nephew should besmirch the family escutcheon, but that his daughter should deliberately contract a mesalliance in the face of his objections, was too much. It was the last straw. The country was going to the dogs. He argued, pleaded, stormed and swore and beat his head against the wall of indifference and obstinacy which his daughter reared between them with the unremitting fury of a wasp that finds itself on the wrong side of a windowpane. This new turn in affairs rendered Mrs. Forest so furious that she snapped right and left regardless of persons like a dog possessed of the rabies, rendering herself the most disagreeable person in the house.

The alarming rapidity with which event succeeded event, whirling them onward to some unseen end, was more than sufficient to convince them all that life was fast becoming a very uncertain quantity. No one knew what the morrow might bring forth; and all, with the exception of the Captain, were wrought up to a pitch of nervous tension that threatened the breaking

point. Don Felipe shadowed Chiquita and the Captain — Chiquita and Blanch regarded one another with increasing suspicion — Dick pressed his suit with the ardor of desperation; while the Colonel and Mrs. Forest nagged on all sides. Even Señora wore an anxious, worried look. It was evident to all that things, as they were, could not continue much longer. Only the Captain seemed capable of keeping his head above water; for him the future held no terrors. The more complicated matters became, the more serene he grew; for had he not vowed that he would see things through to the end? They would all have an opportunity of judging who it would be that would laugh last.

The *fandango* would relieve the tension. Blanch's inspiration was truly a stroke of genius, for anything was better than a continuance of the present state of affairs. Ever since Dick's declaration of love, Bessie had fought and struggled against the tide of events which was overwhelming her by making herself as disagreeable as possible in his eyes. But what could she do to thwart the machinations of a man who laughed at her moods, who encouraged her with each fresh outburst?

Scarcely an hour elapsed after parting from him, than a note was slipped into her hand by some one of the many Mexican attendants, telling her how he adored her moods. That a frown from her was sweeter than the perpetual smile of another woman; that he loved a woman of spirit; that she would find him on the morrow in the dust at her feet as usual; that the sensation he experienced while being trampled upon could only

be likened unto that of being borne aloft on wings, etc. She grew hot and cold by turns as she read these missives, and sulked and softened and flew into fits of passion, and tore them into bits, thoroughly disgusted with her weakness and her inability to remedy matters, and invariably ended by wishing to see him again. Clearly, her only hope of delivery lay in the alternatives of instant flight, or of ridding herself of his importunities by marrying him; either of which she found equally difficult and impossible to execute. She did not know that Dick was putting on a bold front; that his attitude was assumed; that, like her, he was at his wits' end; that, if she suffered, he suffered tenfold. Her annoyance was insignificant in comparison to the cyclonic outbursts that swept over him.

Ah, yes, Anita, Concho's wife, had predicted events with fair accuracy. When he sought to take her, she was not there, but somewhere else — everywhere. Just like a kitten that frisks among the leaves in autumn when they are whirled about by the wind; now here, now there, now up a tree. Though each had taken the measure of the other with fair accuracy, each had misjudged the other's strength; and it was becoming problematical just how much longer he would be able to hold out. Nothing had ever daunted him. All his life long he had never failed to accomplish the things of real importance. No undertaking had ever proved too great. Colonel Yankton, his foster-father, had taught him the value of perseverance, and he had learned his lesson well. He instinctively felt that the great crisis of his life was at hand; that all his efforts, his successes

in life must count for naught so far as he personally was concerned, should he fail to win her. He knew that his fate hung in the balance, that the morrow would practically decide whether the one thing his life lacked would be added unto it, or that he would go on to the end alone.

He had gone for a stroll in the town after the customary gathering in the *patio* in the evening. The others had long since retired for the night when he returned to the *Posada*. Feeling no inclination to sleep, he seated himself on the veranda in front of the house, and lighting a fresh cigar, smoked and mused; his gaze fixed on the tall moonlit hedge which separated the *Posada* from the highroad; his thoughts reverting to the days of his boyhood. Again he saw the Colonel, tall and erect, the personification of manhood, indomitable will and courage, seated upon his horse at the head of his regiment, and heard the ringing, clarion notes of the bugle — the signal for the charge. Yes, he would make one more supreme effort, and if that failed, well. . . . His cigar had burned low. He tossed it over the veranda rail and rose with the intention of retiring, when his attention was arrested by the faint sound of a horse's hoofs on the highroad in the distance. Something seemed to tell him to wait, and acting on the impulse, he paused and listened. The sounds drew nearer, increasing in volume as the animal approached, until a horseman finally turned in from the road at an easy canter and drew rein before the *Posada*. Both man and horse were covered with dust which shone white as

snow in the moonlight; a proof that they had traveled far during the day.

"*Buenas noches*, Señor," said the rider, a Mexican, swinging himself from the saddle and ascending the steps to where Dick stood.

"Good evening," replied the latter in Spanish, eyeing the man curiously.

"I wish," continued the stranger, "to speak with one Señor Yankton who, I was told, lives in Santa Fé. Perhaps, Señor, you can tell me where I may find him?"

"I am Señor Yankton. What do you want?"

"Ah!" exclaimed the man, stepping back a pace and regarding Dick critically. "Your appearance answers the description well, Señor, but that is not enough — I must have proof." Just then a *vaquero* on night duty who had been lounging in the deep shadow at the far end of the veranda came forward on hearing the sounds of voices.

"Diego," said Dick, addressing the latter, "tell this gentleman whether I be Señor Yankton or not. He says he wishes to see him."

"Of a truth, Señor, here is the man you seek," answered Diego, addressing the stranger.

"*Bueno* — good!" ejaculated the Mexican, pulling a sealed packet from the inner pocket of his jacket. "I come from the Rio Plata, six days' journey toward the west. I have been commissioned to deliver this to you, Señor," and he handed the packet to Dick who, taking it, gave instructions to Diego that the man and his

horse be properly housed for the night. Then, with an "*hasta la vista,*" and "God be with you until the morrow, Señor," he retired to his room. There, by the dim light of a candle, he carefully scrutinized the address on the packet, but did not recognize the writing. Nevertheless, he instinctively felt as he turned it over in his hands before breaking the seal, that, in some manner or other, it was intimately concerned with his fate.

XXVII

THE preparations for the *fandango* were complete. The men and women of the household, under Juan Ramon's supervision, had worked hard since sunrise, stringing gayly colored lanterns and arranging tables and chairs, palms and potted flowers and shrubs in the *patio*. It was close on to five o'clock and they now rested in the *patio* in the shade of its arcades, smoking cigarettes and sipping black coffee, and chatting and laughing as they viewed with satisfaction the results of their handiwork. The day gave promise of a perfect night. It was to be a typical Spanish *fiesta*, and in order that the illusion might be complete, both the Whites and the Indians were to appear in their national costumes. All the leading Spanish families of the town and the neighborhood would be present. Not an invitation had been refused.

Captain Forest had agreed to take tea with Blanch in the garden, and, true to his word, he appeared punctually, almost on the minute. The pretty Rosita, the only one of the household excepting Señora Fernandez and Juan Ramon who understood and spoke English after a fashion, withdrew reluctantly after depositing her tray containing tea and *tortillas* upon the table. She adored the beautiful Americana, and had been doing a great deal of thinking of late. The rea-

son for her coming might not be Don Felipe at all, but Captain Forest, the grand Señor. Who could say? The ways of the Americano, the *gringo*, were so different from theirs. Everything they did was exactly opposite to their way of thinking and doing things. No well-bred, unmarried Spanish woman would dare take tea alone with a man unless they were engaged.

The signs of autumn were visible on every hand. The long, languid, summer travail had ceased and the season of dreams begun. Though the sky was a clear steel-blue overhead, the horizon was veiled in a thin blue haze into which the landscape and distant objects seemed to fade and lose themselves. Filmy threads of gossamer floated through the air, suffused with a soft golden glow. Most of the birds had ceased to sing and the drone of insects became less persistent, as if fearful to disturb the hush and calm that pervaded the land.

Captain Forest noticed, as he seated himself at the table opposite Blanch, that the golden glow in her hair was almost a perfect match to the shafts of sunlight which sifted down upon her through the branches of the trees overhead. And he wondered at his resisting powers — why the spell of her fascination no longer held him as of old, not realizing that his love for her had waned in the same proportion that he had grown beyond her. The air of restraint which existed between them would have been apparent even to a stranger, but Blanch had decided to dissipate this feeling if possible. She laughed and chatted as though entirely at

her ease, as though nothing had ever come between them; making sarcastic remarks on the customs of the country; calling into requisition all the blandishments and fascinations which a woman of her intelligence and attraction was capable of exercising upon a man. Every word, every look and gesture fell upon him like a caress. She flattered, cajoled and contradicted him, employing that subtle, deceptive art of refined coquetry to which a sensitive nature like the Captain's was most susceptible. Nor were its effects lost upon him; they were soon both at their ease. She was the old Blanch again; the girl and companion of his youth — the woman of yesterday.

The struggle that was being fought out inch by inch between her and Chiquita was drawing swiftly to its close, and must end as abruptly as it began. She had only begun to realize what the full significance of love meant in the hour that she felt the loneliness occasioned by the lack of it. She had miscalculated. She thought she was stronger than Captain Forest, but could she have cared for him had he been a weaker man? It was his strength which she both loved and hated, and deep down in her heart she knew full well that, were he weaker than herself, she must have ended by despising him. She, like Chiquita, was fighting for her life, her very existence so to speak; but of course he did not divine the full significance of the struggle — what it meant to them both; no man could.

"Does the charm of this land still continue to hold you, Jack?" she asked carelessly, passing him a cup of tea.

"More than ever," he answered, lighting a cigarette and wondering what she was leading up to.

"Don't you think you have had about enough of it?" she continued, with just a shade of sarcasm in her voice. "You have had a royal vacation and I'm glad you have enjoyed yourself so thoroughly, but, honestly, don't you think it's about time you were returning to your work again, to the world to which you belong, of which you are a part and from which, in spite of all effort and argument, you cannot possibly separate yourself? You know, I never could take your idea seriously, Jack," she added, with increasing confidence, addressing him as one would a naughty child. He only smiled by way of reply, and quietly blew a ring of smoke into the air.

"I see you are as obstinate and determined as ever," she continued rather petulantly. "Don't be overconfident though; you might fail, you know, and failure is always discouraging — it involves such a waste of time."

"If I do, it will be the first time I have failed." He was about to continue, but checked himself. They were getting on dangerous ground. She understood his inference and colored and smiled. For some time neither spoke. A gold leaf, one of the first heralds of autumn, dropped silently down from the bough overhead to the center of the table. He took another sip of tea.

"Jack," she said at length, raising her eyes from her hands in her lap where she toyed with her fan, "supposing a position were offered you, one quite worth your while, would you return? Not immediately, but

later on, when you have grown a little tired of playing at the game of life? In six months, say — or even a year if you like?" Her whole attitude and expression had changed, and a look of pleading and expectancy shone from her eyes. Again he smiled. What was she driving at? he asked himself.

"I'm afraid it will be longer than that, Blanch," he answered. "Besides, what position could possibly be open to me? You know, my name is struck from the lists. At least, it ought to be if it isn't."

"Possibly," she answered. "But, if you cared enough, there might be another chance!"

"What do you mean?" he interrupted, regarding her curiously. In reply, she quietly drew an official document from her bosom and handed it to him across the table without a word. He colored, and she saw that his hand trembled slightly, betraying the emotion he felt as he opened the envelope and glanced hastily over its contents. "The Ministry to Turkey — Blanch!" he gasped, regarding her in astonishment.

"Yes," she answered nervously, watching closely the effect the news had upon him. "I received it a week ago. The President knows how clever you are, Jack, and has promised to keep the position open for you if you will consent to accept it. You know, he always had a warm place in his heart for you."

"Blanch!" he said again, overcome by emotion. And laying the document down upon the table in front of him he rose to his feet.

"Turkey, Jack, is but a step to London, St. Petersburg, Berlin or Paris," she said softly, looking up at him

and catching her breath in the effort to conceal her excitement. "It is yours, Jack, if you wish it. Understand," she resumed, lowering her gaze and running her slender white hand slowly back and forth over the edge of her half-open fan, "that it is yours without reservation. You are under no obligations. Turkey and — I are two different things," she added slowly and with difficulty, without looking up; her neck and face turning a deep scarlet. She felt the intensity of his blazing eyes upon her.

"Blanch!" he cried, and this time there was a note of anger in his voice. "Don't think me ungrateful, I beg of you. I appreciate what you have done, and I thank you with my whole heart, but — I can't do it, Blanch!"

"Jack!" she cried, throwing off the mask and springing to her feet. "I can't stand it any longer! I can't see you wreck your life in this way! Can't you see the folly you are committing? Don't think me presumptuous; that I am trying to meddle, interfere in your life. I am merely trying to save you from yourself! It's your last chance, Jack. Go back again and never mind me; I've nothing to do with it! I can easily understand how this life can have a certain fascination for you, but only for a time; it can't last. The more I see of it, the more I'm convinced that I'm right. What's the use of mincing words, fencing about the truth any longer? I understand — I've seen it from the first. It's not this life, but the woman that holds you!" she cried abruptly and passionately, almost fiercely, betraying her jealousy.

"Don't wreck your life and happiness before it is too late. You must tire of her as inevitably as you will tire of this life, and what then? Can't you see that, when you have exhausted the glamour, and the fascination of things is gone, she would no longer be a companion to you? The difference between you — your lives, your world and hers, is too great. It is insurmountable — impassable! What can she know of the world which you and I know, to which you belong? Of another race, another blood, she must ever remain an alien, a thing apart from yourself; there can never be a true affinity between you. She is a savage — an aborigine sprung from the soil. The tinsel and veneer of civilization which she has acquired doesn't change her and can't endure. She is still a savage in spite of it, the product of savage ancestry living close to the soil. The simplicity and glamour and freedom of this life casts a spell over one and attracts one of your adventurous nature, sated with the pleasures and luxuries of our world, but will the spell last? Once you have exhausted the simple, elemental joys of such a life, it must become irksome, mere animal existence, unbearable, positive boredom to you. That in her which attracts you now must inevitably become commonplace in time and repel you. You could not endure that, Jack; you who are evolved through thousands of generations from a higher, superior race. Your reason and instinct must tell you that.

"Jack!" she cried in a fresh outburst, "we were made for one another! How can she, an Indian, the product of savagery, understand you who are of a different race, the product of civilization? Your soul can

never find the full response in hers that it can in mine. I know I was foolish — call it willful rather than foolish — the instinct that is born in me to command. I should not have let you go. I should have consented to share the life you proposed, but I did not believe you were in earnest; I did not think it would last. Besides, how could you have expected me to understand? It was too much; you had no right to ask it of me then. I thought, of course, you would come back to me again, Jack; I waited for that. Can't you understand? But you didn't come back, and I repented of my mistake a thousand times. We all make mistakes, Jack!"

His manhood revolted against being compelled to listen to her confession, her pleading. It was undignified, cowardly. It disgusted him and he hated himself for it, but what could he do?

"Don't say that, Blanch," he answered gently. "It is I who should ask forgiveness. I know it was too much to ask you to share such a life with me, but I did not realize it at the time. I wronged you, I know. I would gladly make reparation if I knew how."

"Oh! none of that virtuous, good-humored acquiescence, Jack! I want you to forget everything, all but the days before it happened, when you loved me — when you swore that your love was as constant as the stars! Have you forgotten your oath? To be true to yourself, Jack, you must forget!" She paused. It was the first frank utterance she had made since her coming; and, for the time being, she seemed to have forgotten her resentment toward him.

"I have not changed, Jack," she went on. "I am the

same as then; I only did not understand you. How could I have guessed that which lay buried within you, those latent ideals and conceptions of life which you yourself were ignorant of? But I understand you now, Jack. It was the foolish conceit of the girl's heart that caused me to forget what I owed you; but now it is the woman who speaks, who bares her soul to you, brimming full of love and passion and tenderness for the man she loves and longs to protect — the woman who loves as the girl could never have loved, Jack."

The light that shone from her eyes bespoke the voice of her conscience; told him that she at least spoke the truth. Never had she appeared more beautiful, more fascinating and alluring than at this moment, as she stood before him, flushed and radiant and trembling with passion, confused and indignant and ashamed; the woman rebelling within her at being thus forced to lay bare her soul, make confession before the man she loved. It was cruel and he knew it. Her words were like knife-thrusts at his heart, filling his soul to its depths with sympathy and compassion for her, and bitterness and loathing for himself.

The vision of yesterday with its gay scenes which he had cast aside, rose before him again. Its seductive allurements swept over him with redoubled force like a great compelling wave, filled with music and light and laughter, the false, seductive charms of which their present surroundings knew naught. The magic of her voice, her face, her touch had lost none of its charm. He felt her fascination still, in spite of himself and the bitterness of former days which he had cherished in his heart

mere fact of speaking and the sound of his voice seemed to recall him to himself, to the realization of where he was and what he was doing. He felt that he was still master of himself and his confidence slowly returned. "I know you can't understand," he continued. "But somehow, I seem to have grown beyond you."

"Jack," she said, drawing still closer and laying her hand upon his arm and looking up into his face, "I know you have had more experience than I have had, but don't imagine that you have grown beyond me. Your ideas have caused me to think. I, too, have grown since we last parted. If you can give up the world, so can I. If you will not return again to the world with me, I'll remain here with you. I'll do anything you say!" she cried in passionate surrender. "My body is soft perhaps in comparison to hers, but I'm strong. I'll soon be as strong as you or she and be all the more to you, infinitely more to you than she can ever be. I know I did you a great wrong in the past, Jack, but let me make up for it now. It is my privilege, my debt to you, and your duty to let me do it. You have no right to break your promise to me, Jack. You can't. Your manhood must tell you that it is as sacred now as the day you gave it to me, and I hold you to it. I'll show you a love you have never known — can never know without me!" She drew still closer, laying her other hand upon his shoulder caressingly; her arm almost encircling his neck. He felt her warm, fragrant breath upon his lips and the thrilling, magnetic touch of her body, vibrating and pulsating with passion and emotion. How soft and voluptuous and tempting and alluring

that body and presence were! It was as though the spices and perfumes and sunshine of far away, mythical Cathay had suddenly descended upon him and enveloped him.

"Jack," she continued, "we have always been comrades, pals; we were made for one another! We are one in thought now as much as we ever were — more than we ever have been!"

He knew this to be false; that he possessed a grip on life which she did not; that he had passed far beyond her since they had last parted. She had had her opportunity and had thrown it away. It was too late. She could not follow him now, she had missed the psychological moment. Even had she cast her lot with his in the beginning, he knew that she never could have followed him. She was immeshed; her feet were caught in the net. The blandishments of life had taken too deep root in her soul for her to cast them forth as he had done. And yet his conscience smote him for her sake, for what she suffered, that she was thus forced to humiliate herself before him. Sentiment and old memories surged up within him and urged him to keep her. What, after all, did it matter where or how they lived? The world would go on its way the same as it had always done; it didn't wish to be reformed and wasn't worth reforming.

"Take her! take her!" cried those voices more persistently than ever. "Don't be a fool and miss this opportunity which, once gone, shall pass out of your life forever. She's as beautiful and as brilliant as the other woman; one of your own race and, after all, will wear as well. Besides, you know her and you don't know the

other woman, and if disappointed in the latter — what then? Take her!"

The vision of Glaire's wonderful conception, "The Lost Illusions," rose before him. He saw again that exquisite figure of the Egyptian, strong and sensitive, in the prime of manhood, seated upon the shore of the Nile, watching the bark of destiny laden with the fair illusions of youth, draw slowly away from him and grow fainter and fainter in the soft, mellow light of age, as it floated away on the evening tide of life. He, too, stood in the prime of manhood. Was this to be his end, mocked and laughed at by fate — the price he must pay for daring to lift his eyes from the dust to the stars to fulfill the dream of the ages? God knew how he had fought against the invisible power that had driven him on step by step to his present state. He looked down into the beautiful upturned face of the woman before him whom he had known so long, whom he had loved and adored; gazed deep into those soft, azure eyes, limpid as two crystal pools, saw those full red upturned lips waiting to be kissed — kissed. Again her lips parted.

"Jack, Jack, Sweetheart, I'm waiting —" she murmured softly, encircling his neck completely with her arm and drawing his face gently down to her own. Just then the rhythmic silvery whir of wings caused them to look upward. Through the boughs of the tree they saw the indistinct form of a white dove that fluttered overhead for an instant and then was gone. At the same moment Captain Forest distinctly recognized the scent of Castilian roses, as though their fragrance had

been wafted full in his face by a breeze, and yet there was no breeze, nor were there any roses close at hand; the season of roses had passed.

No man could have resisted for long the fascinations of a woman like Blanch Lennox if she chose to make love to him. It was the sound of those wings and the fragrance of the roses that upheld Captain Forest's resolution; especially the fragrance of the roses. Whence it came or how it originated, who could say? For it came and passed like a mere breath. Perhaps the invisible angel who, it is said, presides over the destiny of the individual, caused it; for with it flashed the vision of Chiquita before his eyes as he had seen her on that day in the garden among the roses and had silently watched her from the back of his horse and breathed deep drafts of the flowery fragrance. The same subtle, invisible something that has changed the destiny of individuals and of nations through all the ages, caused him to remember, recalled him to himself. The manhood surged up within him, asserting its supremacy, and he drew himself up with a sudden impulse. She noted the change, and in a fierce, passionate voice, almost of terror, cried: "Jack, you are mine, you have always been mine! I will not give you up — I claim my own!" and she flung her arms passionately about his neck in an endeavor to draw his lips down to her own.

"I can't — I can't do it, Blanch!" he said, and shook himself free. With a cry, terrible in its intensity and despair, she sank across the table.

XXVIII

PALE and trembling and humiliated, Blanch pulled herself together with an effort and stood for some time as one dazed where the Captain had left her. Then, she remembered, she had smiled and bowed absently to the men and women in the *patio* on the way back to her room, where she flung herself down upon the couch in a frenzy, burying her face in the cushions; her frame shaking with passionate, convulsive sobs as she writhed in paroxysms of untold grief and pain.

He had refused her, dared to refuse her — her! She had failed! Was this, then, the end, the reward for righteous ambition, conscientious endeavor? For years she had worked and schemed for the realization of her ideal, and this was the end. How proud she always had been of him, and how perfectly her beauty and brilliancy would have crowned his career — their lives! And now, when ambition's goal was attained, that rare cup of earthly joys of which few men drink, had been rudely dashed from her lips.

So this was the reward that had been reserved for her who had been endowed with wealth and position, and who was the fairest and best this civilization could produce? Fate had been kind to her merely in order that she might realize to the utmost the bitterness and emptiness of life.

Life — what did it mean, what did it hold for her now? She knew as well as Captain Forest did that, strong though she was, she was nevertheless too weak to share with him the life he had chosen. Civilization and culture had prepared her for everything but that; the one vital essential which nature alone can give to man was lacking. After all she was but a poor, helpless creature, incapable of meeting and being satisfied with the simple demands occasioned by the natural conditions of man's surroundings. Neither could she return to the old life again, now that it was shorn of its vital interest, and year after year cast her bread upon the waters in the uncertain pursuit of happiness, only to reap the harvest of dead-sea fruit that is ever borne in on the shallow tides of worldliness.

She recognized in herself the victim of a system of lies and frauds, a world of artificiality, deceit and tawdry tinsel, a life which, in spite of the good it contains, makes weaklings of men. Thanks to her bringing-up, the sunland of love, that valley of the earthly paradise, was closed to her forever. She cursed this world of hypocrisy and deception and all it contained — her friends and acquaintances and the memory of her father and mother, who unabashed, had perverted the pure, unsullied gaze of the child, directed its steps in the paths trodden by its degenerate forefathers, taught it to regard falsehood in the light of truth.

Let the world cry out in protest — say they did their best. The world lies, and knows it lies. They did not do their best. They followed the dictates of selfishness, despicable, inherent weakness. But why had this

come to her who had been a willing instrument, who had lent herself to the dictates of this world and who, of all others, was the most fit to grace it?

"I curse you — curse you!" she cried aloud, springing to her feet in a fresh paroxysm and frenzy, flinging her clenched hands aloft, her features livid with rage. But what did her mingled transports of grief and pain and anger avail her? There was no redress, no appeal from the decision of destiny. It was fate, and she had been singled out for the sacrifice. Again she cried out in agony of heart and soul. Had she been strong like the other woman, he must have loved her — his love never could have died!

The thought of Chiquita brought her to herself in a measure, and as she slowly began to pace the floor, Don Felipe's words came back to her. If she did not possess Jack, no other woman should. Besides, she knew what he did not know — that even if he wished to, he could not marry Chiquita. A grim smile flitted across her countenance as the knowledge of this fact flashed through her mind, the only ray of light in the chaos into which she had been plunged by that misguided, luckless decision on her part — her refusal to follow the Captain while he was still hers.

She knew it was purely revenge that had prompted Don Felipe to run her rival's secret to earth, and she despised him for it. It was not so with her — the thought of revenge had not entered into her calculations. But neither Chiquita nor the Captain would escape. It was justice, nothing more nor less; for they, too, like her, stood before the tribunal of destiny

and must bow to its decrees the same as she had been forced to bow to them. Yes, she would give the signal to Don Felipe that night; it was the only right thing to do.

She was calmer now, and when Rosita knocked lightly at her door and entered the room to assist her in dressing for the evening, no one would have suspected the ache at her heart or the storm-swept soul which her calm exterior concealed.

XXIX

PADRE ANTONIO sat before the open window in his living-room in a large, comfortable chair, enjoying the beauty of the evening and the fragrance of the last flowers in the garden, waiting for Chiquita to complete her toilet.

It was one of those soft, balmy autumnal evenings, and gave promise of a night of majesty and serenity when the moon rose in her full glory to hold her silent watch over the earth once more. It was sweet to live on such a day as this, when all the world seemed at peace; and what a perfect night for the *fandango.* Presently the sound of light footsteps and the soft rustle of a dress interrupted the train of his thoughts, causing him to turn from the window to Chiquita, who, attired in her ball dress, entered the room and paused before him.

There was not an inharmonious touch in her attire of soft creamy satin and lace, richly embroidered with golden flowers. Delicate filmy threads of gold intersected the heavy white Valenciennes lace mantilla attached to her high silver comb, etched in gold and studded with diminutive diamonds, which sparkled in the light like dew in the sunshine. Her white satin slippers and silk stockings, like her corsage and *saya,* were also delicately worked in gold. A sheaf of golden

poppies adorned one side of her head, nestling close down upon her neck and shoulder in the folds of her jet black hair. She presented a truly striking appearance, and Padre Antonio gazed long and silently at her, his keen eyes scanning her critically from head to foot in an effort to detect a fault.

How he loved his little girl! It almost seemed as though she were endowed with something more than earthly beauty. In her the strength and grace of the deer and panther were blended with the ethereal delicacy and beauty of the flower. But it was her face that bespoke the luminous nature of the soul which dwelt within her. So close was the bond of sympathy and mutual understanding between them, that she instinctively half divined his thoughts and it gave her courage.

"Will I do, Padre *mio?*" she asked with a slight hesitancy, smiling and looking down at him inquiringly. The question was so characteristic of her that he could only smile in response.

"Chiquita *mia* — there's one thing lacking," he said at length, the far-away, dreamy look fading from his eyes.

"Something lacking?" she repeated in surprise, turning and casting an involuntary glance at the small mirror on the wall opposite in a vain effort to catch a full view of herself.

"Yes, Señorita," he answered knowingly, almost mysteriously. "But it's not your fault. It sometimes takes the discerning eye of a man to perceive what a woman's toilet lacks."

What can it be, she asked herself, looking wonder-

ingly and inquiringly up into his face, and then turning to follow him with her gaze as, without further comment, he left the room and slowly ascended the stairs to his study on the floor above. He paused for an instant on entering the room, then walked straight to his desk at the other end; a large upright piece of furniture of ancient pine made in the mission style and stained dark to represent oak, which, owing to its age, it closely resembled. Pulling out the middle drawer, he pushed back a secret panel on the inside, disclosing an opening in the back of the desk from which he drew a small sandalwood box which, on being opened, contained a silver casket, richly chased and of an antique design.

Years had elapsed since he last looked upon it, and he regarded it curiously for some moments as he held it in his hands. Then setting it down upon the desk, he turned the small key which unlocked it and raised the lid, disclosing its contents, which consisted of a fan, a bracelet of six strands of large pearls with a diamond clasp in the shape of a crown, and a long, magnificent necklace of still larger pearls, also composed of six strands, like the bracelet, and a large diamond slide also in the shape of a crown. The fan was one of those exquisite, daintily hand-painted French creations of ivory, lace and vellum of a century gone by. On one of the outer ribs was also a small diamond crown and on the other was traced a name in letters of gold. A delicate fragrance like that of withered rose leaves escaped the casket, and, as he silently contemplated its contents, his gaze fell upon the name on the fan — Chi-

"Instinctively he raised the casket with both hands"

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quita Pia Maria Roxan Concepcion Salvatore — the name was much longer, but his eyes dimmed — he could read no further.

Instinctively he raised the casket with both hands and was in the act of pressing his lips to its contents, when he caught sight of a crucifix on the desk in front of him, causing him to pause, cross himself reverently and lower the casket again.

Who was Padre Antonio? Involuntarily his thoughts traveled back over the stream of years when, as a youth of twenty, he bade farewell to old Spain forever and with a heavy heart set forth alone to find God and peace in the wilderness of the new world. Fifty years had passed since then and with them, the secret and tragedy of his life lay buried.

He heaved a deep sigh and, picking up the casket, turned toward the door. Chiquita listened to the sound of his footsteps as he slowly descended the stairs, and gazed in wonderment at the casket he held in his hand when he reëntered the room. Without a word, he deposited it upon the table in the center of the room and, raising the lid, displayed its contents to the dazzled eyes of his ward. Never had she beheld such wonderful jewels — what did it mean?

"Padre *mio!*" she gasped, her eyes wandering questioningly from the casket to his face, which appeared a little paler than when he left the room but a few minutes before.

"I never imagined that another woman would ever be created worthy to wear them," he said quietly, picking up the bracelet and fastening it about her left wrist, and

winding the necklace twice round her throat, the ends falling down over her bosom to her waist. "May God's blesing forever rest upon you, my child," he added, making the sign of the cross above her, and stooping, he kissed her lightly on the forehead.

Involuntarily her hand went out for the fan, and as her eyes fell on the name upon it, her woman's instinct told her all.

"Padre — Padre *mio!*" she cried, and throwing her arms about his neck, burst into a passionate flood of tears on his breast.

"There, there, my child!" he said at last, regaining his accustomed composure. "I now know why I was never able to part with them — not even to the Church. I was keeping them for you."

"But I'm not worthy to wear them, Padre!" she exclaimed.

"Tut, tut!" he replied. "The ways of God are past all understanding. When I think of how you came to me unsought and unbidden, and now, how Captain Forest of a different race —"

"Oh, Padre, do you think I stand a chance of winning him?" she interrupted, looking inquiringly up into his face as if to read the answer there.

"Ah! that is a difficult question, my child. Love and intrigue are such uncertain quantities to deal with, you know. Yet it seems strange that he should have come into your life at this juncture. Captain Forest," he went on after a pause, "is a great man. As you know, we have talked much together of late on that most *interesting* of all topics — life. And it seems to me that

if ever God had plainly indicated his wish, you have been reserved for one another to perform his will. Of course, I can not say this for a certainty, but it appears so to me, and to see your hands and hearts joined together will be the crowning joy of my life —" Suddenly his left hand went to his heart, where he experienced a sharp pain. A dizziness seized him, causing him to lean heavily upon her for support.

"Padre *mio* — what is it?" she cried in alarm. "You are not well! We'll not go to the *fiesta* to-night — 'tis better we remain at home!"

"It's nothing — nothing, my child," he answered, after the dizziness had passed. "It's only a slight attack of indigestion, like the one I had last summer while engaged in the mission work. You know," he added lightly, "I'm no longer as young as I was — such things must be expected." All day long she had experienced a dread of impending disaster which she could not shake off, and which she naturally connected with Don Felipe. But why go to the *Posada* that evening if Padre Antonio was not feeling well — there would be other days.

Again she protested and urged him to remain at home, but in vain — he would not hear of it.

"It will do me good to go," he said, helping her on with her long white silk Spanish mantle, embroidered with gold and lace to match her dress. Then, drawing on his black silk gloves, he picked up his hat and stick, and they passed out into the garden and through the tall iron gate, turning their steps in the direction of the *Posada.*

XXX

THE garden and *patio* of the *Posada* were hung with many lanterns whose light, in addition to that of the stars and the full moon, made them appear as bright as day.

Mrs. Forest maintained a frigid attitude toward the world throughout the evening. Inwardly she longed to be gay like the others, but prudery and short-sightedness, the fruits of her training, prevailed, effectually debarring her from all enjoyment and leaving her cold and isolated like one afflicted with the plague. Could she have followed the dictates of her wishes, she would have remained within the seclusion of her room during the entire evening, but not being able to reconcile such a course with the duties of a chaperon, she was obliged to appear. If *noblesse oblige* demanded that she should sacrifice herself, suffer the martyred isolation of patience on a monument, then be it so!

As for Colonel Van Ashton, he had suffered long enough. He secretly despised his sister's prudery though he dared not acknowledge it. Anything to break the infernal monotony! He welcomed this occasion of mild revelry with sensations akin to those of a boy's during the advent of a circus in his town. Of all the State and grand social functions in which

he had participated, not one, so far as he could remember, had ever inspired him with such anticipations. An indescribable joy and spirit of recklessness, born of desperation, filled him, and he silently vowed that he would drink to the moon that night even though there might perchance be blood upon it.

Owing to the attack of dizziness which had occasioned a slight delay, Padre Antonio and his ward were the last of the guests to arrive. Low murmurs and suppressed exclamations escaped the Spanish element of the assembly as Chiquita entered the *patio* on the padre's arm. If they had been enraptured by the beauty of Blanch and Bessie and loud in their praises of their jewels and exquisite gowns, they were crushed by Chiquita's appearance, clad as she was in white and gold, a dress they had never seen before, and adorned with jewels, the magnificence of which they had not dreamed.

At last the mystery of the golden *pesos* was solved — the jewels of course! A great weight slipped from the souls of the Spanish women as they gazed in envy and amazement upon the person they hated most in all the world.

Happy, blissful ignorance — thrice blessed by the gods were they! Those golden *pesos* would not have purchased a single strand in her bracelet, while as to the necklace, its value would have purchased the entire *Posada* and many broad acres besides. Don Felipe and the Americans had seen such jewels before in the world of fashion, but how came Chiquita by them? Who was she? Blanch and Bessie began asking them-

selves. That she had timed her entrance well, all admitted; though in reality she had thought nothing about it — chance had favored her, that was all. Interesting though the subject under discussion had become, there was little time left the company for further speculation before Juan Ramon, the major-domo, announced supper.

The musicians struck up a lively Spanish air. The night was mild and soft, the stars and moon glittered overhead, the wine flowed and the sounds of laughter and gay, merry voices echoed throughout the *patio*. The company sat long at the tables, tempted by innumerable dainties, and encouraged and soothed by the wine, the night and soft strains of music. Not even in the old days had the *Posada* witnessed a gayer scene. Indeed, for the time being, they had returned like a far-off echo of those times when Doña Fernandez reigned supreme in her beauty and men admired and flattered and paid homage to her. Little wonder she sighed in the midst of the gayety and alternately flushed and paled as her thoughts traveled back over the years.

Don Felipe was in an exultant mood. That morning his horse had stumbled and later, while dressing for the evening, a bat flitted in and out of his room through the open window. The fact that these two signs of ill omen did not affect a mind ordinarily subject to the influence of superstition, showed the state of his confidence. He drank freely of the wine and laughed and talked incessantly. What an opportunity to spring the trap he had laid for Chiquita!

"If Captain Forest proposes to her to-night, she'll

never lift her eyes to the world again," he whispered to Blanch beside whom he sat.

"What do you propose doing?" she asked.

"Have patience," he answered, his face lighting up with an expression of malicious joy. "Of course, it all depends whether you give the signal or not."

"I came here with the intention of doing so," she confessed. "But everybody seems so happy. Why not let the evening pass pleasantly? It would be a pity to mar its harmony."

"Mere sentiment!" he replied. "Do you think she would show you such consideration? I assure you, to-night is the time of all times!" There was something so malicious, so weird in his tone and manner that she shuddered as she listened to his words. In spite of her humiliation, her bitterness and suffering, and her desire for retribution, she never realized that one could find such sweet satisfaction in revenge as did Don Felipe. The prospect of it filled him with a joy that seemed almost devilish at times.

At length the tables were cleared, and coffee, liqueurs, cigars and cigarettes served, Blanch and Bessie, like the Spanish women, indulging in the latter. In fact, everybody, with the exception of Mrs. Forest, smoked. The musicians were ranged in a semicircle across the upper end of the *patio* opposite the garden and continued to render national and Spanish airs upon their instruments while the company smoked and sipped coffee and liqueurs. And by the time the men had finished their first cigars, the different artists, dancers and singers, who had been engaged for the occasion, came for-

ward and began to display their talent, adding to the novelty and gayety of the evening. Considering the time and the place, they did well enough in their way and were quite picturesque and pleasing as a whole, but at no time did their performance rise above the level of mediocrity, such as one was accustomed to see anywhere in the world on the vaudeville stage. At the end of an hour, Blanch felt that the moment had arrived to ask Chiquita to dance. So, without imparting her intention to any one, she rose from her chair and walked over to where Chiquita sat conversing with the Captain and Don Agusto Revera, Alcalde of Santa Fé.

"We have heard so much about your dancing, Señorita," she began, interrupting the conversation. "Won't you favor us with a dance to-night?"

"A dance?" repeated Chiquita with a little start of surprise, the request coming from Blanch was so unexpected. She seemed confused, and her face wore a troubled look. "I would rather not," she said at length, glancing nervously about her at the company. She had heard the cruel things that had been said of her of late and knew how ready those present would be to criticize her anew.

"Do dance, Señorita; just to please me, if for nothing else," persisted Blanch.

"To please you?" repeated Chiquita. A peculiar light came into her eyes and she smiled as though pleased by the request.

"I hope I'm not asking too much?" continued Blanch. Again Chiquita smiled.

"Do you know," she answered with warmth, "there's only one thing in this world I wouldn't do for you?" and she laughed lightly, nervously opening and closing her fan the while. Again she glanced around at the company, wavering between assent and refusal. In the faces of the women she read the jealousy and envy which filled their hearts toward her, and it was perhaps that, not Blanch's request, which decided her to dance.

"Yes, Señorita," she said at length. "I'll dance for you this night — for you only!" she repeated with emphasis. Yes, she would dance as she had never danced before; for would not the most critical eye in the world be watching her? It was worth while. Blanch gave a little laugh as she returned to her seat by the side of Don Felipe.

Ah! the wiles of woman — subtle and illusive as a breath or a shadow — the one thing her own sex fears most! Blanch knew that if there was a common streak in her rival, it would be brought out in the glaring reality of the dance, and the Captain should see it. She knew he could never marry any one but a lady, and this was her reason for asking Chiquita to dance. She had in mind, of course, the performances she had just witnessed, or, to be more exact, the contortions of the ballet and the modern music-hall artist with which we are all so familiar; the inane balancing and pirouetting on the toes, the heavy hip and protruding stomach, quivering breasts and bellowing and frothing at the mouth, and colored light effects and *risque* posing in scant attire, coupled with a display of attractive lingerie. But Blanch forgot, or rather did not know, that

she had to do with genius over whose individuality most men are prone to trip.

Chiquita's conception of plastic art was something different from vulgar Salome creations and the cheap spring-song and lolling and capering of the fatted calf just alluded to. Had Don Felipe cherished a ray of hope of reinstating himself in Chiquita's eyes, he would have done all in his power to prevent her dancing, but, as matters stood, he welcomed it with enthusiasm, for he knew that she would be irresistible — that Captain Forest would be ravished by her enchanting creation and alluring beauty as she glided through the intricate mazes of the dance in the moonlight. He had felt that spell, and knew its irresistible charm.

The announcement that Chiquita was going to dance caused a stir among the company. A large dark blue Indian rug which shone black in the moonlight, was brought from the living-room of the house by the servants and spread out upon the *patio's* pavement. A murmur of approbation arose from the Mexicans when the first bars of music announced the dance she had chosen. It was the famous "Andalusia"— the most difficult and intricate of all Spanish-Moorish dances; the one in which few dancers have ever excelled for the reason that its beauty lies not so much in its intricacy of form as in the poetic conception and free interpretation of the artist. Besides, the dance called for two parts, obliging her to execute the part of her supposed partner as well. The dance opened with the song of a Torero who had repaired in the dusk to the hills overlooking Granada where dwelt his sweetheart.

With a coquettish little laugh and toss of the head, she tossed her fan to Captain Forest who caught it and held it in his hand as he would a flower. Then, after some words of direction to the musicians, she stepped upon the end of the rug nearest them, and to the amazement of the Americans, lightly kicked off her slippers, displaying a pair of small, slender, exquisitely formed feet and ankles. Only amateurs have the courage to dance in shoes. Even that strict and stilted institution, the ballet, was forced generations ago to break through its time-honored traditions by abandoning heels as useless appendages. Had she been on the stage, she would have danced in her bare feet as she had done on the night of the *fiesta* when Captain Forest had seen her.

A smile rested on her face and she nodded her head lightly to the time of the music as she stood erect in the full flood of moonlight, tall and slender as a lily.

"Thy face, Sweetheart, haunts me amid the dust and glare of the arena!" she began in her deep rich contralto voice, at the first notes of which everybody sat up straight and listened to the volume of swelling sounds which filled the court and garden and floated away on the night. There was no mistaking the fact, they were in the presence of an artist.

"I await thee, Beloved, in the hills, in the hour of our tryst!" came the far-away answer of the woman's voice, faint and plaintive as an echo, soft and sweet and clear as the notes of the skylark, falling in silvery, rippling cadences of melody from out the gold, blue vault of heaven above.

"Nearer and nearer love guideth our steps,
On the hills we shall dance, chant our song of
Delight 'neath the silvery stars and the
Mellow gold horn of the soft shining moon.

"'Neath the silvery stars, and the mellow gold horn of the soft shining moon," echoed the musical refrain and chorus of musicians. Nearer and nearer drew the answering echoes of the lovers' voices until they met in the hills and the dancing began.

So realistic and dramatic was her rendering of the song, that the listeners saw the progress of the lovers and felt the thrill and rapture of their meeting. Up to this point she had held herself in abeyance, but with the opening bars of the dance, she suddenly became transformed, electrified. Her whole being became suffused with the vibrant, passionate intensity of the South, and then they witnessed an exhibition that was beautiful and wonderful in its poetic conception.

A thrill of rapturous, exquisite emotion swept over them, as suddenly and without warning, she threw back her head and sprang to the center of the rug with a swift, whirling motion, the effect of which was like a shower of sparks or a jet of glittering spray tossed unexpectedly into the air from a fountain, expressive of the abandon and exuberance felt by the lovers as they met in the dance.

Again, without warning, she paused as abruptly as she began, and with short, interluding snatches of song, slowly began to sway to the soft rhythm of the music and sharp click of her castanets. First slowly, then swifter and swifter she glided and whirled noiselessly

in the moonlight, graceful as a wind-blown rose, or suddenly paused, languid and sensuous, according to the rhapsodic character of the dance when the music ceased altogether and naught was heard save the plashing of the fountain in the *patio*, the click of her castanets and the soft swish of her silken *saya* which seemed to whisper and sigh like a living thing, like the mythical voices of Lilith's hair. Like a musician transposing upon a theme, she introduced new and elaborate motives of her own until, at a sign from her, the music took up the principal theme of the dance once more.

Captain Forest had seen practically all the great dancers of our time, the Geisha and Nautch girls of the East, the Gypsies from Granada to St. Petersburg, and the Bedouin women dance naked on the sands of the Sahara beneath the stars while celebrating the sacred rites of their festivals, but it soon became apparent that, all with few exceptions, were mere novices in comparison, and stood in about the same relation to her as a dilettante does to an artist.

She lifted the dance above the portrayal of sensuous emotion into the realms of poetry. The wild spirit of the Gypsy, captivating, fresh and invigorating and compelling as the winds of the mighty Sierras and plains of the land she inhabited, enveloped and animated her. The rushing, whirling climaxes up to which she worked were startling — tremendous. The subtle, hypnotic influence and witchery of her presence filled her entire surroundings and so held and dominated the spectators that they were swept irresistibly along with her as the rhythm of the dance increased. She swayed and

enthralled the imagination and emotions with a supremacy akin to that of music or the noblest landscape. The mastery of every motion, every fleeting expression but increased the impression she endeavored to convey — the intensity of life, vibrant, joyous life.

The soft, rhythmic undulations of her graceful, sinuous body, vibrating and pulsating with the ecstatic, rapturous emotion inspired by the music and the dance, were a revelation of beauty. She became the living expression of rhythm and grace as she paused for an instant before them, scintillating and quivering like an aspen leaf, or glided and whirled wraith-like, fragile and delicate and ethereal, wondrously lithe and airy like films of gossamer or foam tossed up by the sea. The dance itself seemed to fade into the background as their attention became riveted upon her, and visions and vistas of life rose before the imagination instead.

She danced with her soul, not with her feet; became the living incarnation of the ancients' conception of plastic creation, enchanting, intoxicating. They heard the myriad voices of spring, the voices of birds and insects and the sound of falling waters; beheld the Elysian, flower-strewn fields of youth, recalling the immortal, fairy days of childhood and with them their golden dreams, and experienced the sweetness and bitterness of unfulfilled longings and aspirations of later years. All felt that it was an event of a lifetime — one of those hours that would never again return.

The company gave vent to its emotion in alternate exclamations of enthusiasm or sighs as it was swept irresistibly along by the buoyancy and captivating crea-

tion of the dancer. Two bright tears stood in Padre Antonio's eyes as he gazed upon the object of his love and pride. Don Felipe forgot his hatred for the moment and gazed enraptured, drinking in with eyes and soul the enchanting vision before him. The heart of Blanch grew cold as ice as she, like the rest, looked on entranced in spite of herself by the witchery of her rival, for she knew she had blundered again, that she had lost, that Chiquita was transformed — irresistible. The blood seemed to freeze in her veins as the truth was borne in upon her. She longed to scream, to rush forward and stop her — anything to break the spell, but in vain. Helpless and immovable she was forced to look on; see the prize of life slip slowly from her grasp.

Again Captain Forest beheld the mighty expanse of mountain and plain, heard the lashing of the sea and the myriad voices of the singing stars as they whirled in their courses through space — listened to the chant of life. Yes, she was the ideal, the living incarnation of nature, the Golden Girl with the white starry flower on her breast who was awaiting his coming, the woman of José's dream to whom he had been guided unconsciously by the hand of the Unseen. No wonder he had failed to find the place of his dreams; without knowing it, he had been waiting for her. But now all was changed. The earth had become their footstool; the old life had come to an end.

XXXI

A SIGH of regret escaped the company as the dance ceased. Blanch turned to speak to Don Felipe, but he was no longer by her side — he had vanished. The musicians struck up a waltz. It was now the turn of the guests to dance if they chose; a privilege of which they were not slow to avail themselves.

Captain Forest crossed over to where Chiquita sat, resting after the exertion of the dance.

"I'm sure you've had enough dancing this evening, Señorita," he said, handing her her fan. "Let us go into the garden; it's quieter there." His words filled her with a tumult of emotion. She realized that the moment for which she had been waiting had arrived. She looked up at him without replying, then rose from her seat, and the two quietly left the *patio*, disappearing among the shrubbery and the shadows.

Neither spoke. Each guessed the other's thoughts, and they walked on in silence until they came to an open circular space surrounded by trees and flooded by moonlight, where, as if moved by a common impulse, they halted. Without a word he turned and silently folded her in his arms.

"Jack —" she murmured.

"Chiquita *mia*," he said at length, gazing down into her upturned face where the dusk and the moon-fire

met and blended in a radiance of unearthly beauty, "is it not wonderful that, all unwittingly and unconscious of each other's existence, we have been brought together from the ends of the earth?" She was about to reply when a voice, close at hand, cut her short. It was Don Felipe's.

"A pretty sentiment, Captain Forest," he said, stepping out into the light before them. "I wish I might congratulate you, but you will never marry her."

"How dare you!" cried the Captain furiously, advancing toward him with flushed face and clenched hands. Chiquita started violently at the sound of Don Felipe's voice. The apprehension of an inpending catastrophe that had oppressed her during the day, but which she had forgotten during the excitement of the dance, again took possession of her.

"I apologize most humbly for intruding on your privacy," answered Don Felipe, meeting the Captain's gaze unflinchingly, "but as one who wishes you well, I could not stand quietly by and see a man like you cunningly tricked by this woman."

"What do you mean?" asked the Captain, his eyes blazing and his voice almost beyond control.

"Chance or fortune, which ever you may choose to call it, has recently placed certain information in my possession which will entirely preclude any thought on your part of marrying her." What can he mean, Chiquita asked herself. She had expected an attack on the Captain and was prepared for it, but this — what was it?

"You perhaps already know," continued Don Felipe

coolly, "that this woman and I were once betrothed to one another, but had I at that time known what I now know of her, such a thing as a betrothal would have been out of the question."

"And this information?" interrogated the Captain.

"It is very simple, Captain Forest," replied Don Felipe, slowly and firmly. "The Señorita Chiquita is — the mother of a child."

"The mother of a child?" cried Chiquita in astonishment. "You lie!" His words were like a blow in the face to the Captain. For an instant the world seemed to swim before his eyes, but only for an instant. Had he rushed upon Don Felipe then and there as he felt impelled, it would have been what the latter most wished him to do. He would have then had sufficient provocation to kill him on the spot. But a lion never springs before he has taken the measure of his leap.

"Don Felipe Ramirez," said Captain Forest at length, in a hoarse, half-audible voice, "unless you give me instant proof of what you say, either you or I shall never leave this place alive! Understand," he continued, "that when I ask you for proof, it is not because I doubt this woman, but that your life and mine are at stake."

"Well spoken, Captain Forest," returned Don Felipe. "'Tis the answer I expected; the utterance of a gentleman, a *Caballero!* You shall have the proof you desire — the living proof, Captain Forest," he added with emphasis.

"Proof?" exclaimed Chiquita in amazement. "Are you bereft of your senses, Don Felipe Ramirez?"

"Ah! you have played your part well these many years, Señorita. It is now my turn to cut the cards. If you will return to the *patio* —" he continued, turning to the Captain.

"Why not here?" asked the latter.

"Because the proof which you desire awaits you there." The Captain was about to protest further, when Chiquita interposed.

"Come!" she said, and without further words, turned and silently led the way back to the *patio* followed by Don Felipe and the Captain, the latter scarcely able to control his desire to seize Don Felipe by the throat and choke the breath out of his body. She knew that Don Felipe had laid a most ingenious trap for her; that was to be expected. But what form it would take, she was at a loss to divine until they reached the *patio;* then it all came over her at once. She was to be publicly accused. Don Felipe was capable of that, and she shuddered as she pictured to herself the scene it would be certain to create.

There was a pause in the dancing. The musicians were playing an interlude, and as the three reëntered the *patio,* the eyes of all present immediately became centered upon them. Just opposite to where they halted sat Blanch and Padre Antonio, conversing together.

"I would much prefer to spare you a public humiliation," said Don Felipe, addressing the Captain in a low tone. "It is not too late. But if you still insist on having the proof at this time —"

"The proof by all means!" exclaimed Chiquita with-

out giving the Captain time to answer, her eyes blazing with indignation.

"Very well, since you insist," replied Don Felipe, glancing for an instant in the direction of Blanch. As he did so, both the Captain and Chiquita noticed that she let fall, as if by accident, the pink rose she held in her hand. Instantly Don Felipe turned and clapped his hands, whereupon, an old Indian woman, bowed with age and supporting herself with a stick, and accompanied by a pretty little Indian girl of five or six years of age, emerged from one of the doors of the house and paused, bewildered by the unusual sight that greeted their eyes; the lights and flowers, the music and gayly dressed men and women. Chiquita started and uttered a low cry as her gaze fell upon the old woman and the child. Captain Forest noted the ashen hue of her face and felt her hand tremble as she involuntarily clutched at his arm as if for support. Then she suddenly seemed to recover her composure.

"That?" she exclaimed, and began to laugh, almost hysterically. It was evident to the others that something unusual had occurred. The music suddenly ceased, and save for the murmur of the fountain in the center of the court, not a sound was to be heard. All eyes were now turned upon the old woman and the child who still stood silent and motionless, gazing in bewilderment upon the strange scene before them. Suddenly the child uttered a cry of joy.

"Madre! Madre *mia!*" she cried, and running across the court, flung herself into Chiquita's arms. Then it was that the latter grasped the full significance

"'Madre! Madre *mia!*' she cried, and flung herself into Chiquita's arms."

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and gravity of the situation. What could have been more compromising and humiliating for her?

"Marieta, *niña mia!*" she exclaimed, stooping and kissing the child, without realizing that her words and action only compromised her the more.

"Is this the beautiful garden you told me of, Mother — which you said you would one day take me to see?" asked the child, gazing delightedly about her.

"Yes, yes, *cara mia!*" she answered hastily, holding the child close to her. Instinctively the others began to draw near the little group.

"What brings you here, Juana?" she asked sternly of the old woman who by this time had crossed the court and stood before her, leaning on her stick.

"They said you sent for us, Señorita, and compelled us to come."

"I never sent for you!" answered Chiquita.

"Do you wish for further proof?" asked Don Felipe, addressing the Captain. "You see, the child found no difficulty in recognizing its mother," he added sarcastically.

"'Tis a lie!" cried Chiquita. Captain Forest was speechless, stunned. As for Don Felipe, he only laughed at Chiquita's impotent rage.

"Between five and six years ago," he began, "the Señorita and one Joaquin Flores brought this child late one night to the Indian *pueblo*, Onava, and placed it in charge of this woman with whom it has lived ever since. Is it not so?" he asked, turning to the old Indian woman.

"It is, Señor," she answered in confusion.

"And has not the Señorita visited the child each month and provided for its wants ever since the day it was given into your charge?" Again the old woman answered in the affirmative. "And has not the child," continued Don Felipe, "always called her mother ever since it has been able to speak, and have you not always thought her to be its mother?" The old woman hesitated and glanced nervously about her as though seeking a way of escape.

"Speak, Juana!" commanded Don Felipe sharply. "Onava lies within my domain. Unless you speak the truth, I'll have you and the rest of your family driven to the desert to starve."

"It is so, Señor!" sobbed the old woman, thoroughly frightened by Don Felipe's threat, yet not daring to raise her eyes to those of Chiquita.

"You now know why the Señorita Chiquita danced in public during the *Fiesta*. It was to provide for the wants of her child," he added with a sneer.

"I can't believe it!" exclaimed Captain Forest contemptuously, breaking the long silence he had preserved. "The introduction of this child and woman doesn't prove anything that I can see."

"Every Indian in the village," interrupted Don Felipe, "will substantiate what you have just heard. Why, the Señorita herself taught this child to call her mother. But there are still other things which you shall learn in due time."

"Chiquita," said the Captain without heeding Don Felipe's words, "speak! I know you can explain."

She glanced up at him for a moment and then cast her eyes down at the child.

"I must first send to La Jara for Joaquin and Manuelita Flores," she answered. "When they come, I shall be able to tell something definite concerning this child."

"You can spare yourself the trouble," broke in Don Felipe. "They are both dead."

"Dead?" she cried, starting violently. "Joaquin and Manuelita dead?"

"Their bodies, together with those of their horses and wagon, were discovered early this morning at the foot of the *mesa* which lies between here and La Jara, directly below the point where the road winds along the rim of the cliff. Doubtless their horses became frightened in the dark and jumped over the cliff before they could save themselves."

Chiquita uttered a low cry. "You've done your work well, Don Felipe Ramirez," she said at length, suddenly straightening and stiffening as she faced him, the expression on her face changing to one of hatred and contempt.

"It was no easy task to run you to earth, I'll admit," he retorted with the same sneering look of triumph on his countenance.

The only two persons upon whom she could rely, who could corroborate what she had to say concerning the child, were dead. No, there was one other, a man, but he too was gone — no one knew where. She saw the hopelessness of her plight. Nothing she could say

or do could alter the opinion of the world toward her. She might continue to deny the charge, protest her innocence, accuse others, but to what avail? Without the actual proof, all must believe that which they were so ready and willing to believe. Had not the child recognized her, called her mother before the world? Even though the charge might never be actually proven, and Captain Forest refuse to believe it, there would always be this thing between them which she could never explain satisfactorily. It was not natural to suppose that he could possibly forget it or continue to believe in her protestations of innocence without the corroboration of others. The hour must surely come in which he would be assailed by doubts. She felt she had lost him, and with the knowledge of her failure, was seized with a sickening sensation and an acute pain at the heart. A misty veil rose between her and the world and she swayed unsteadily as though about to fall. She knew she must not faint. She drew her hand across her eyes, then, putting all her remaining strength into the effort, she slowly drew herself up.

Strange, that she and Don Felipe should have been created to become the nemesis of one another! The child, awed by the silence and grave faces of the bystanders, instinctively divined that there was something wrong between her and them, and clung mutely to Chiquita's skirt, a frightened look on her face.

Chiquita, meanwhile, stood gazing straight out before her, her head slightly inclined forwards, her face white and set, her heart burning with shame. It was not so much the question of guilt or innocence that affected her

now, but the shame of it all. What must the Americans think of her? She felt the burning, searching gaze of those about her and the joy they experienced at her discomfiture. Never had she been at a loss to know which way to turn to extricate herself from a difficulty; but now, how helpless she was. She nervously tapped the palm of her left hand with her fan, vainly racking her brain in an effort to find a solution. Dick, who had been watching her narrowly the while, saw a strange light begin to play in her eyes in which he read Don Felipe's death as plainly as though it were written across the heavens in letters of flame.

"Chiquita, you must say something," said Captain Forest. "I tell you again, I don't believe it, but for your own sake — speak!"

"Yes, my child, speak!" entreated Padre Antonio, stepping before her. "Can't you see your silence is condemning you?" She looked up at him and saw that his face was ashen, colorless like the Captain's — that he seemed to have suddenly aged. Notwithstanding, there was the same kindly expression in his eyes she had always known, and she felt that, even though the world refused to believe in her, he might; he might even forgive her. She saw in her present humiliation and shame, a direct punishment for the betrayal of the Padre's confidence. Had she confided her secret to him, this could not have come upon her. Now, however, it was too late. She had no right to expect sympathy even from him.

"Chiquita, for the last time, I ask you to speak!" pleaded Captain Forest, racked between doubt and be-

lief in the woman he loved. Just then, little Marieta began to cry.

"Madre, madre!" she gasped between her sobs. "I'm afraid of these people. Take me away — take me home again!"

"Be not afraid, my little one, they cannot harm you," she answered, drawing the child closer to her and laying one hand on its shoulder. Another embarrassing silence, broken only by the low sobs of Marieta, followed.

"Chiquita," demanded Padre Antonio at length, "has this child the right to call you mother?" There was a stern ring in his voice and she knew her last moment of grace had come; that it was useless to hesitate longer. She glanced at the Captain, then at the Padre and then down at the pretty, tear-stained face of the clinging child. Again she felt that peculiar pain at the heart and thought she was going to faint as she struggled with herself between honor, her love and respect for Captain Forest and Padre Antonio and her devotion to the child whose life, she knew, depended upon her answer. Up to that moment she had been completely at a loss to know what to say or how to act, but that invisible something which until then had deprived her of speech, now seemed to impel her to answer in the affirmative.

It was the supreme moment of her life. After all the years she could not abandon the child now; the woman in her forbade it. She must go on to the end. Again she glanced down at Marieta, and then raising her head and looking into Padre Antonio's eyes, said quietly: "Yes, she has that right."

"It's not true; I don't believe it!" cried Captain Forest in a tone in which was expressed all the shame and disgust he experienced on seeing the woman he loved dragged into the mire before his eyes.

"Captain Forest, you have heard the truth," answered Chiquita.

"Then there is nothing further to be said!" broke in Padre Antonio who was anxious to end a scene that was growing more painful each moment. Without a word, the Captain whirled on his heel and walked toward the garden. Clearly, the effects of the drop of poison instilled so adroitly into their lives by Don Felipe were beginning to be felt.

It is doubtful whether Blanch would have given Don Felipe the signal could she have foreseen the consequences. Her rival could have been exposed without being publicly humiliated. Nevertheless, an ineffable joy filled her soul. She knew now that Jack either must return to her, or he would never marry. His sensitive, overwrought mind frenzied and made desperate by despair might even drive him to kill himself in the end, but what did it really matter so long as no other woman possessed him?

Don Felipe fairly reveled in his revenge and took no pains to conceal it. It was the sweetest moment of his life. At last she too knew what it was to be struck to earth, to lie prone with one's face in the dust, the jeers of the world ringing in her ears. Of a truth, to quote Dick's words, "Had the devil raked hell with a fine-tooth comb, he could not have produced a more accomplished villain than Don Felipe Ramirez."

XXXII

AS Chiquita and Padre Antonio left the *patio*, accompanied by Marieta and old Juana, the women drew back from her as though from some unclean thing. Gladly would they have spared Padre Antonio's feelings, but their hatred and jealousy were too intense and the opportunity to cast a stone at her too tempting for flesh and blood to resist.

Greatly to the astonishment of every one, it was noted that Padre Antonio carried his head quite as high while leaving, as when he entered the *patio* during the early part of the evening. They expected him to limp away, a crushed and broken old man; but they had yet to learn the unbending spirit of the Padre. Although humble in the sight of God, experience had taught him that the only way to command the respect of men was to hold one's head high while among them.

What must he think of her now, to be requited thus after all he had done for her? Chiquita asked herself as she, with Marieta and Juana, followed him homeward. The opinion of the world concerning her, and the loss of Captain Forest's love, seemed little in comparison to the thought that he should believe she had betrayed his confidence. She could endure anything but that. Had she but told him all in the beginning, he might have been spared the shame of this disgrace. Perhaps it was not

yet too late; she would tell him all that night. True, she could not make amends for the pain she had caused him, but perhaps he would understand — forgive her.

She knew that a continuance of her residence in Santa Fé was no longer possible. Strange that it should have ended thus, and what was before her now? She knew the world only waited to shower wealth and distinction upon her should she choose the stage for a career; or, she might return to her people. But what would life be to her under any conditions without Padre Antonio's respect and the Captain's love?

Strong and versatile and capable though she was to cope with the world, her lot was not an enviable one. It was with Godspeed, not the maledictions of one's neighbors, that she had hoped to leave the place which had sheltered her so long. And Padre Antonio — how could she part from him thus?

Captain Forest's last words were her only solace; he had tried to believe in her to the end. Let come what might, they would remain with her always like a benediction, a tower of strength in some future hour of trial. And then there was Don Felipe. Ah, yes, Don Felipe! Her teeth came together with a snap, for she knew that, even after what had transpired, he would follow her.

Padre Antonio walked silently homeward without so much as turning round once to look at the others. Not even after arriving at the great iron gate before the garden did he pause to allow the others to pass in ahead of him as he otherwise would have done, but walked straight on to the house and entered the living-room

without so much as looking round, leaving Chiquita to dispose of old Juana and the child for the night.

Padre Antonio was no fool. Perplexed though he was by what had occurred, he knew there was a time for silence as well as a time for speech. He also knew that Chiquita would join him as soon as the others were settled for the night, and that she would then tell him her story.

Outside, the garden was almost as light as during the day, and the room, though partially in shadow, was illumined by the moonlight to an extent that rendered objects within it distinctly visible. The events of the evening had sorely taxed his strength. He was thoroughly tired, and with a sigh he threw himself into his large leathern chair to rest until Chiquita returned.

"What was the mystery in connection with the child?" he asked himself, closing his eyes in thought. Don Felipe's story could not be true. "It was absurd, preposterous!" he cried aloud, opening his eyes with a start. As he did so, his gaze fell upon a picture on the wall opposite, gleaming conspicuously in the full flood of moonlight. It was that beautiful illustration of what human faith may accomplish; the familiar representation of Saint Elizabeth of Thuringia meekly displaying the contents of her apron before her lord, the Landgrave — that heavy, sporadic type of whiskered ass whose only mission in life seems to be that of pulling the stars and all else down about his wassail-soaked head and ears through sheer avoirdupois and stupidity. Padre Antonio experienced a sudden thrill as he gazed at the picture. Clearly, it was the hand of God directing him.

So did Saint Elizabeth deliberately deny the truth, and yet the bread in her apron was turned to roses.

Instinctively he recalled Captain Forest's last words. And then, putting two and two together, he also recalled the fact that he had noted something during the scene which nobody else seemed to have noticed, namely: that the face of the child, Marieta, was the living image of Don Felipe's. Like a flash all became clear to him, and he smiled and nodded as the truth dawned upon him, and he wondered greatly at Chiquita's discretion. Yet why should he be astonished? Was it not like her?

Chiquita also wondered in turn, and was much perplexed by his attitude, the quiet, benign expression of his face, when she entered the room after bidding Juana and Marieta good night. She had expected exactly the reverse. What did it mean, did he know anything? But she did not stop to question him. Before unburdening her soul, she must first divest herself of the jewels which, ever since the terrible scene at the *Posada*, she felt she had dishonored. Their touch seemed to burn her flesh.

"Padre *mio*," she said quietly, as though nothing unusual had occurred, "you know I said it would not be necessary to wear these jewels longer than to-night. I really never should have worn them at all. It was not right, for, as you see, I am not worthy of them." She began to unclasp the bracelet on her arm, but hastily putting forth his hand, he checked her.

"No, my child!" he said, rising from the chair. "You must keep them — they are yours. Besides, they

are so becoming to you! Again I say — you are the only woman in this world worthy to wear them."

"Padre, Padre *mio!*" she cried, starting backward and gazing full in his face. "You — you believe in me?"

"How could you have imagined anything else, my child?" he answered quietly. Without attempting a reply, she threw herself upon his breast, convulsed with sobs and trembling in every limb, telling him plainer than words how terribly shaken she had been by the ordeal through which she had just passed. He did not attempt to soothe or pacify her with words, knowing how useless it would be, but waited quietly for her passionate outburst to subside.

"Ah! Padre *mio*, how good you are, and how have I requited you!" she said at length, looking up at him through her tears and slowly disengaging herself from his arms. "You know," she continued between convulsive sobs, and slowly drying her tears, "that little Marieta is the child of Don Felipe and Pepita Delaguerra." Padre Antonio started at the mention of the latter's name.

"Pepita Delaguerra?" he repeated. "I felt all along that she was Don Felipe's child, the resemblance is so striking, and I wonder the others did not notice it, but I never connected her with Pepita; perhaps because it is so long since she died. How strange that he should have introduced his own child without knowing it!"

"Yes," returned Chiquita. "And yet it is not so strange after all. Persons of his character invariably

blunder in the end, clever though they be. Another strange coincidence is that they were married just six years ago to-day in the little Mission church of San Isidor at Onava."

"Why, that was before Don Juan's death, and in direct opposition to the stipulations of his will!" exclaimed Padre Antonio excitedly.

"Just so," answered Chiquita. "That's what caused the trouble. The entire property should have gone to the Church, but Felipe destroyed the record of his marriage before his father's death and the birth of his child."

"The scoundrel!" cried the Padre.

"But that is not all," continued Chiquita. "Everything seemed to be in league with him to further his plans. Father Danuncio, who secretly married them, also died before Don Juan did, without divulging the secret."

"Strange!" ejaculated Padre Antonio.

"There were three witnesses to the marriage — Joaquin and Manuelita Flores, whom Don Felipe has cleverly put out of the way, and Bob Carlton, the gambler, who, at that time, was Don Felipe's intimate friend; but he, too, is gone and never dare return."

"The clever scoundrel!" interrupted the Padre.

"Yes," answered Chiquita. "When it comes to deviltry, Don Felipe has yet to meet his match. But as I was about to say: Six months after the marriage, Don Felipe deserted Pepita, then the child was born, and knowing that he would unhesitatingly make way with it should he learn of its existence, Joaquin and I took it to

Onava, where we knew it would be hid effectually from the world. Of course old Juana and all the other Indians in the village thought the child was mine, and I let them think so in order that its identity might the better be concealed until we were able to prove to whom it belonged."

"But why did you not tell me this in the beginning, my child?" he asked with a note of reproach in his voice. "I might have —"

"Ah, that was to protect you, Padre *mio!* It might have been wiser had I done so, and yet I think not. I felt impelled to keep you in ignorance of the facts, for I knew that Don Felipe would stop at nothing. What would your life have been to him, had you come between him and his position? His wealth is too vast. I knew that, as surely as you raised your voice against him, as you would have been obliged to in the interests of the Church, you one day would have been found dead in some lonely pass in the mountains while engaged in your Mission work."

Padre Antonio was too astute an observer of men not to perceive the force of her words.

"I marvel at your sagacity, my child; but think what it has cost you!"

"Ah! that is the marvelous part of it!" she replied. "Whoever would have imagined that, unconscious of the true facts, he would have succeeded in turning my own weapons against me? It's fate, Padre *mio.*"

He paced back and forth for some time in silence, then suddenly pausing before her, said: "This cloud must not rest upon you, Chiquita *mia.* We must find

that blackleg, Carlton, if we have to raise heaven and earth to do it."

"That is easier said than done, Padre *mio*," she answered quietly.

"God never wholly abandons his children to the evil of the world," he returned firmly. "Don Felipe has deceived the Church once, but he shall not do so a second time. God has allowed him to triumph thus far in order that his punishment may be all the greater in the end when it comes upon him. Carlton must be somewhere just across the border — in Texas or Arizona or New Mexico. Within twenty-four hours after the word has been flashed over the wires, runners will have passed through all our remote Missions along the border, and if he is no longer in Mexico, then the word shall be passed across the frontier into the United States. If he still be alive, he can not escape us. We will find him and bring him back again. No, the Church is not so powerless as many, strong in worldly possessions, imagine. The Church of Rome has never yet failed to find the man or woman she has set out to find. Don Felipe will be stripped of his possessions and his child restored to its rightful position.

"Again I say, God's ways are past all understanding. You have been His unconscious instrument. Think of what you were and how you came to me, and what your life has been since then! Have you endured all for naught? Are God's plans to be frustrated by a man, a dastardly craven like Don Felipe? No, my child, I see things clearer now than I ever have seen them before. You and Captain Forest have not been

brought together from the ends of the earth only to be mocked by the world of evil. God demands that we all shall pass through the fire in order that we may be fitted to bear the burden He lays upon us. You both have endured the trial; proved yourselves worthy of the mission He has entrusted to you."

He paused. Then, suddenly recollecting the all-important question, he exclaimed: "I forget, we are wasting time; we must find Carlton! This very night word shall go forth!" and hastily snatching up his hat and stick, he hurried out into the night.

XXXIII

CAPTAIN FOREST'S feelings are better imagined than described. His brain was in a whirl, on fire. For the second time a woman had treated his confidence lightly. The whole world seemed to spin round him in chaotic confusion as he sought to lay hold of a single, tangible thought that might temper his judgment, steady his nerves and check the fierce outbursts of passion which were fast sweeping him beyond self-control. He had reached a state of recklessness that renders a man of his temperament most dangerous, and unless his judgment soon got the better of his passions, he would, as likely as not, either kill Chiquita or Don Felipe, or both of them.

The company had broken up shortly after the departure of Chiquita and Padre Antonio, leaving the *patio* silent and deserted, save for the presence of the Captain, who paced silently back and forth; the moon flooding the *patio* with broad sheets of white light, causing objects to appear almost as sharp and distinct as before the lights of the lanterns were extinguished.

Blanch, who was the last to leave, would have offered him her sympathy, but on approaching him, he gave her a look so terrifying that even she dared not speak to him. She accordingly retired to her room and seated herself before the open window from which she com-

manded a view of the court and could observe him at her leisure. Perhaps he will come to his senses now, she thought. At any rate, he now knew what she suffered. She experienced a feeling of cruel satisfaction and exultation while calmly watching the struggle going on within him as he paced slowly back and forth.

How strange that they should be there in that out-of-the-way place! In spite of the terrible ordeal through which she had passed and the dramatic climax in which the struggle had just culminated, it still appeared so unreal, so unnatural to her, that she wondered whether she was not still dreaming and must soon awaken to find herself back in the old life again and Jack near her, as in the old days. Who could have foreseen this tragedy, this end to their lives? But a few months previous all things appeared so clear and defined, so definitely ordained for them.

Truly the future was veiled — a sealed book for man! Had she been permitted to dip for but an instant beneath the cover of that book, or lift the veil ever so little, the catastrophe that had overtaken them and the suffering it entailed might have been averted.

But no. The strange nemesis that had pursued them step by step had been permitted to wreck their lives completely. And for what end — what purpose? Was there no justice, no recompense for them? The answer, she somehow felt, lay not here, but with the stars — in the great universal scheme of things, and was quite beyond her reasoning powers.

She felt the utter hopelessness of longer struggling against the unseen, and in that hour she became a fatal-

ist. Better drift from day to day without purpose, than living, behold one's dreams and ambitions come to naught. She was like a strong, self-confident swimmer who had been caught by the tide and was being swept irresistibly out to sea. Blurred though her vision was, she seemed to see things clearer than she had ever seen them before, and she somehow felt that the fate which had overtaken her was the result of self-aggrandizement — that she in a measure typified the passing or end of a condition out of whose decay the new life must spring.

Submit she must, and yet a fierce resentment against all things filled her soul. She rebelled at the apparent injustice which she felt had been done her. Why had she, the most fit, been chosen? What had she really done to merit such an end? She realized that her trouble was unalterable; that it had its root in the social scheme of things and nothing she could do could alter it. That in reality it was no fault of hers, but the fault of her bringing up; that the world which she had been taught to respect as a thing representing truth and beauty, all that is best in man, was only a mocking illusion.

The injustice of it amazed, appalled, stunned her. She seemed to think and move like one in a dream, struggling with shadowy, intangible forces with which she was incapable to cope. The thought that it was not her fault only added to her bitterness and agony, and she longed for death — the death that knows no awakening — to be blotted out utterly, and forever. Her life was devoid of hope, there was nothing to look forward to, the future had become a blank.

A low moan, in which was expressed the despair and agony of men since the beginning of time, escaped her. She pressed her cold hands to her burning, throbbing temples and prayed that, whatever her end might be, it would come swiftly.

Again she raised her head and glanced through the open window. To her surprise she saw the tall form of Dick Yankton leaning against one of the pillars of the arcade that ran round the *patio*. He was smoking quietly and observing the Captain, who still strode back and forth apparently unaware of his presence. Suddenly the Captain stopped short as if he had come to a decision. As he did so, he turned half round and saw Dick, whom he regarded for some moments in silence. Then, going over to where he stood, she heard him exclaim: "It's not true, Dick, I don't believe it. I'm going to her now and tell her so!" At the same instant she also saw Don Felipe glide noiselessly and stealthily from one of the doors opening on to the *patio* and pause in the deep shadow of the arcade next to the wall, close to where they stood. Instantly she was on her feet and leaning forward, breathless and eager to catch all that was said.

"Neither do I believe it," answered Dick. "But I wouldn't have told you so. I wanted you to make up your mind first, and if you hadn't said so just now, I wouldn't show you this, either," he continued, drawing from his inner coat pocket a large envelope from which he took a letter and handed it to the Captain.

She saw the sheet of paper tremble in the Captain's hands as he read its contents. Again Dick handed him

another sheet somewhat larger and darker than the first. He seized it eagerly, glancing hurriedly over its contents, his hands trembling more violently than before.

"Marvelous!" he exclaimed excitedly, looking at Dick. "And yet," he added, "it's not so strange after all; it's so natural!"

Blanch uttered a suppressed cry. She felt that her last chance of winning back the Captain was gone forever. It was a last stab at her heart. At this juncture José appeared from out the shadows of the garden beyond the *patio* and hurriedly approached them. She heard him say something in Spanish which she did not understand. Then, all became blurred before her eyes. She felt herself begin to sway and totter — she fainted.

Following José, the Captain and Dick came upon Starlight, quietly cropping the grass in the garden, just outside the corral. On hearing their approach, the Chestnut raised his head, and, seeing his master, gave a low whinny of recognition. Close beside him on the grass lay a dark, shapeless object which, on closer inspection, proved to be the remains of Juan Ramon, trampled almost beyond recognition by the stallion's terrible hoofs.

While Chiquita was being confronted by Don Felipe and the attention of every one was occupied by the scene that followed, Juan seized the opportunity for which he had been waiting. Stealing quietly away to the corrals, he deftly flung a *riata* over the stallion's head, and, looping it about the animal's nose, was on his back with a bound.

There was no question of Juan's ability to ride him. Once on a horse's back, he had never yet been unseated. He had expected the Chestnut to rear and plunge, to fight desperately on finding a stranger on his back and he was prepared for it, but greatly to his surprise, the horse showed no signs of fight and went meekly out of the corral at his bidding. All went well until they reached the garden, and Juan was beginning to congratulate himself on making his escape so easily, when suddenly and without warning, the Chestnut stopped short, reached round with his head, and seizing Juan by the leg with his teeth, jerked him to the ground. Juan heard the stallion's fierce cry of rage, and — that was the end.

The luck had changed again for Juan, and with it vanished his fair dream of life on the little *hacienda* with the pretty Rosita.

José had long been aware of Juan's intentions regarding the horse, and laughed quietly to himself as he thought of the trap Juan was laying for himself. That afternoon he appeared to be drinking heavily, and early in the evening feigned intoxication in order that Juan might go to his death which he knew awaited him should he so much as lay his hand on the horse.

When Blanch regained consciousness once more, she found herself in a half sitting and kneeling posture before the window with one arm resting on the sill. She must have been unconscious for some time, for when she came to herself, she again saw Captain Forest and Dick standing in the *patio* conversing in low tones. They soon separated, Dick going into the house, and the Captain making his way through the garden. She knew he

was on his way to Chiquita. She also saw Don Felipe steal from the shadow of his concealment and follow him.

A great fear seized her. She felt the imminence of a disaster greater than that which had already occurred. Something terrible was about to happen. The thought aroused her to action and she hurriedly rosė to her feet. If possible, she would prevent that final catastrophe which her intuition told her was imminent — which she knew must overtake either one or all three of them should Don Felipe and the Captain meet again that night in Chiquita's presence.

There was not a moment to lose, and seizing a light wrap which lay on a chair beside her, she flung it about her shoulders and hurriedly left the room.

XXXIV

BEFORE leaving the *patio*, Bessie promised to meet Dick in the garden after the company dispersed for the night. After the Captain's departure, Dick returned to the *patio* and took his stand in the shadow of the nearest trees, where he awaited her.

Never had her mood appeared so distracted and evasive as that evening. She had avoided him as much as possible. He was quite at a loss to know how to take her, and wondered what would be the outcome of their interview which, he felt, might possibly be their last.

Notwithstanding this melancholy prospect, he still experienced the same spirit of buoyancy which possessed him during the day. He had caught her regarding him several times during the evening with what he thought to be a look of tenderness in her eyes, and this, perhaps, accounted in a measure for his present elation.

She, in turn, had wondered greatly at the change that had come over him. How could he possibly be so gay when everybody else was so miserable, and she thoroughly resented it.

During the interval that had elapsed after the breaking up of the company, she had participated in a stormy interview with her father and aunt; the latter endeavoring to point out to her the danger incurred by holding

intercourse with obscure, low-born persons, as had just been demonstrated in the Captain's case.

She was surprised on returning to her room not to find Blanch there, but, on second thought, felt it was only natural after what had occurred that she should want to be alone, and thought she must be somewhere in the garden. She had seen Dick leave the *patio* and disappear in the shadow beyond, whither she directed her steps, passing out and around the front of the house, as she did not wish to incur the risk of being seen by her father or aunt.

Dick, who had tossed aside his hat on the grass and stood leaning against the trunk of a tree, was presently aroused from his meditations by the object of his thoughts, who stood close beside him.

"Well, I'm here," she said, by way of beginning, looking up into his face.

"I was looking for you in the other direction," he replied, throwing away his half-burnt cigar. "I ought to have known better. You are always doing the opposite of that which one expects."

A smile lit up her face for a moment, as she flashed her beautiful wide eyes upon him. She seemed a part of that beauteous night, elfish and delicate as a moonbeam or a flower, fragile as the song of a bird. He could not speak, but stood drinking her in with his eyes and soul, his face wearing a mixed expression of rapture and pain. She knew what he felt, and like him, she, too, struggled with herself for the mastery of her emotion.

"Do you know," she said at length, "this is the first

time I have ever been guilty of a clandestine meeting with a man. If my father knew I was here, he would be beside himself."

"Then you did want to come!" he exclaimed.

"Of course. Otherwise, why should I be here?" she responded shyly, raising her eyes to his for an instant and then lowering them again.

"Bessie!" he cried, starting toward her.

"Hush!" she said, raising her hand in protest and checking him. Had he taken her in his arms then and there, she would have surrendered without a struggle, for she was in that soft, languid mood of a woman in love in spite of herself. But he dared not give way to his impulse. He loved her too much, and feared lest his impetuosity might ruin forever his chance of winning her.

"I know it was foolish of me to come, especially when there was no reason for it," she continued with assumed indifference, casting a sidelong glance at him out of the corners of her eyes. In spite of the pain she knew she inflicted, she could not resist flirting with him just a little even at such a moment. It filled her with such exquisite joy to feel anew the power she exercised over him and the unfathomable depth of his love which each fresh thrust at his heart revealed to her.

"I came here," she slowly resumed, "to ask what you think of Chiquita?"

"Think!" he burst forth savagely, aroused almost to a pitch of desperation by her irritating manner. "Do you take me for as big a fool as Don Felipe, or—" your father? he was about to add, but checked himself

just in time. "When one has known Chiquita as long as I have, you don't think things about her, you know. Don Felipe," he went on, "reminds me of the naughty little boy who one day, while playing in a park, threw mud on a swan, imagining that he had besmirched the bird forever until it dived under the water and reappeared again as white as before. Why, even if I at this moment did not possess the absolute proof of her innocence, nobody could ever persuade me to believe that story. You don't know the Indian as I do, Miss Van Ashton. The high-caste Indian women are quite as incapable of such things as you are. It was a devilishly clever stroke on Don Felipe's part, I'll admit, but he has deceived himself as thoroughly as the rest of the world."

"What proof have you?" she asked with a surprised and mystified look, her woman's curiosity thoroughly aroused. Dick chuckled softly in reply.

"What are you laughing at?" she demanded, not a little nettled by his manner.

"I'm not laughing," he answered. "I'm merely trying to smother the rage you have aroused in me by dallying with me in this manner when you know perfectly well that I asked you to come here to tell you that I —"

"Stop!" she commanded authoritatively. "I wish to see that proof before anything further passes between us."

"Will you never become serious?" he asked, drawing an envelope from his pocket, the contents of which he had shown Captain Forest. "It's strange," he con-

tinued, "that this document should concern you as well as Don Felipe and Chiquita."

"What do you mean?" she asked in astonishment. Again he laughed softly by way of reply.

"It's funny you should get mixed up in their affairs!"

"I don't understand you," she interrupted, more mystified and irritated than ever. "Give me that letter, Mr. Yankton!" she demanded, holding out her hand.

"Then step out into the light, please, you lovely, tantalizing witch," he answered, drawing the papers from the envelope and handing them to her. "If I didn't love you to distraction, I wouldn't stand this sort of thing a minute longer. God!" he cried, glancing heavenward, "you'll be the death of me yet."

"Have you forgotten, Mr. Yankton?" she asked calmly, her face turning a delicate crimson.

"Then read — read!" he cried in desperation, scarcely able to control himself. She knew it could not last much longer. She slowly unfolded the large sheets of paper and began to read their contents in the moonlight.

"Aloud, please," he said.

"Why aloud?"

"Oh, just as you please!"

"Very well, if you wish it. 'Dear Dick,' she began with a slight hesitancy. 'When this reaches you I shall have passed over the border to that unknown range from whence nobody ever returns. Enclosed you will find the record of Don Felipe Ramirez's and

Pepita Delaguerra's marriage which, at Don Felipe's instigation, I stole from the register in the church at Onava, giving him a copy of the same which he destroyed, believing it to be the original. I did this with the intention of extorting money from him later on. I and Joaquin Flores and his wife were the only witnesses to the marriage. But there is a sequel. Pepita gave birth to a child, a girl, after Felipe deserted her. I learned later that Chiquita and the two Flores concealed it somewhere in one of the Indian *pueblos* near La Jara, as they feared Don Felipe would make way with the child should he learn of its existence.'

"How strange!" exclaimed Bessie excitedly. "Why, that was Don Felipe's own child which he introduced this evening and said was Chiquita's."

"Exactly," said Dick, quietly.

"But I don't see what all this has to do with me," she added.

"Proceed, please," he answered. "That's not the only surprise his letter contains."

Glancing down at the sheets once more she resumed:

"'You will also be greatly surprised to learn that the young lady who was present on the day you saved my life and whose name I asked, is my sister.'

"The insinuation is infamous!" she cried, letting the papers fall to the ground.

"Miss Van Ashton," he interrupted, calmly stooping and picking up the papers and handing them to her again, "you forget — you are reading the confession of a dying man."

"His sister!" she continued indignantly. "It can't be possible — I never had a brother!"

"Please proceed, Miss Van Ashton," he replied. Amazed and bewildered, Bessie excitedly resumed the reading of the strange letter.

"'My sister never knew me because I left home shortly after she was born; but, notwithstanding, I recognized her the instant I set eyes on her, not only owing to the presence of my father that day, but to the remarkable resemblance she bears to my mother. She is the living image of her.'" Bessie paused, overcome with agitation.

"How very remarkable," she said, as if to herself. "Every one who knew my mother says we resemble one another very closely in manner as well as in looks. My father always keeps our photographs placed side by side on his desk at home. Except for the difference in the style of dress, it is almost impossible to tell which is which. What he says does sound true," she admitted. "Yet —"

"There can be no doubt of it," broke in Dick. Again Bessie looked down at the papers and resumed:

"'Before I breathe my last, Dick, I want to tell you that I have discovered the lead to the old Esmeralda mine; the enclosed chart will guide you to it. Tell my sister that half of it belongs to her and the other half to Pepita's child if you are able to find her. Perhaps this one and only generous act of my selfish life will atone somewhat for my many misdeeds. Good-by, Dick, and God bless you.'"

"You needn't read that!" he interrupted. But without heeding him, she continued:

"'You are the best and bravest fellow alive. Good-by, Dick, again, for the last time.

"'Harry Van Ashton, better known to the world as Bob Carlton, gambler and —'" The letter ended abruptly. A sob broke from Bessie. Two bright tears glistened like jewels in the moonlight on her long lashes and then stole silently down her cheeks.

"Don't take it so hard, Miss Van Ashton," he said. "Your brother was wild, but not so bad as the world thought him."

"My poor brother!" she murmured.

"I am sure," he resumed after a little, "that when your brother looked into your eyes that day, his manhood reasserted itself; that he repented and threw off his past life like an old garment, and from that moment, stood prepared to enter the presence of his Maker."

"You are very good to say that," she answered, looking up at him with shining eyes.

"No, it's not good of me at all," he returned. "I love you too much to say anything but what I know to be true." She did not reply, but remained lost in thought, her eyes cast on the ground.

"Bessie!" he exclaimed passionately, drawing nearer to her. "Why do you hesitate? You know that I understand you better than any one else ever could. You know you love me!" She knew her moment had come; that she must answer him for all time, and strive as she would, she could not conceal her con-

fusion. He did not know how intense was the struggle going on within her, nor realize what it meant to her to give up the life she had known always.

"And what if I told you," she said at length, her eyes still downcast, "that I care more for you than anything else in this world, Dick?" pronouncing his name aloud for the first time. "What would you say then?"

"That I will love you for all time, Sweetheart! That I will make you the happiest woman in the world!" he cried, his arms closing about her, and kissing her full on the lips.

"When we are married," he said at last, "we'll start in search of the Esmeralda, the famous old Spanish mine that was destroyed by the earthquake, and if, as your brother said, he really found the lead again, you and Don Felipe's child will be the two richest women in Chihuahua."

"Then let it be soon, Dick!" she answered. "Oh! I know I've been perfectly horrid!" she cried, flinging her arms about his neck in a fresh outburst, and kissing him again and again. "But I'll make it up to you, Dick! I'll show you how Bessie Van Ashton can love!" There was another long silence, during which each could hear the beating of the other's heart. Then looking up with a pained, disheartened expression on her face, she said: "I'm sorry I can't come to you with a fortune, Dick. My father will cast me off, and all I now possess in this world are you and the clothes on my back."

"Why, you sweet, pathetic little beggar!" he exclaimed, sealing her lips with a kiss.

"He said he would rather see me dead at his feet

than married to you," she went on. "Of course, if you were immensely wealthy, he might learn to tolerate you in time. We're all like that, you know, but as things are, we'll have to shift as best we can."

"Well, I don't lay claim to much," he said, restraining his mirth with difficulty. "There's the Esmeralda, you know, but even if that fails us, there's no cause for immediate worry. We'll find a modest little hovel somewhere that is large enough to contain our love." And then he laughed long and loud, laughed as he had never laughed before.

"What are you laughing at?" she inquired, with a dawning suspicion that he was keeping something from her.

"Oh, nothing," he answered at length. "You'll forgive me, I'm sure, when I say, that I can't help thinking what an ass your father is!" And Bessie Van Ashton stepped into a bigger life than she had ever known.

XXXV

PERHAPS all was not yet lost. The Padre's words and attitude acted like a wonderful elixir upon Chiquita. They buoyed her up, lifted her soul from the dust where it had been flung and trampled upon.

The house oppressed her, and sleep being impossible, she opened the door and stepped out into the garden and wandered along the paths that led in and out among the flowers and shrubs, inhaling the delicious night air, faintly perfumed with the delicate fragrance of mignonette and heliotrope and a few last roses.

The fresh air and the beauty and quiet of the night soothed her. She felt her strength return, and a great calm took possession of her as she moved to and fro in the moonlight, now casting her eyes toward the stars, now downward at the wan, drooping heads of the flowers which swayed gently in the faint night breeze. Her face radiantly beautiful, her jewels flashing against the pale white setting of her dress and her tawny skin, she resembled more the lovely ghost of some long-departed Spanish woman that had returned to earth to revisit familiar haunts, than one still among the living.

What was he doing now? she asked herself. It was impossible that he should continue to believe in her. It was more than could be expected; no one but Padre

Antonio was capable of that. Just then she heard the sound of footsteps on the walk outside the wall and a moment later, the click of the latch on the gate as it swung open. She thought it must be Padre Antonio come back again, and she turned to meet him. A faint, suppressed cry escaped her, for there, just inside the gate, stood Captain Forest.

He had evidently not yet seen her and paused as if uncertain whether to advance. She stood in the open space beside the bench, just off the pathway leading from the gate to the house, along which he must advance should he decide to proceed farther. A pale, plumy spray of tamarisk intervened between them, otherwise he must have seen her. For some time he stood silent and motionless as if uncertain what to do, then he began to advance slowly in her direction.

What did he want? Why had he come at this hour? Her heart beat high and she began to tremble with excitement as she watched him coming toward her.

Her wan, pale dress so closely resembled the moonlight in the shadow of the tamarisk that he might have passed her unnoticed had she not unconsciously closed her half-open fan which she was nervously clasping in both hands. It shut with a soft, faint snap, causing him to stop and turn in her direction.

"Chiquita!" he cried, and springing forward, had her in his arms before she could prevent it.

"No, no; you must not!" she cried, overcome by his suddenness and vainly struggling to free herself.

"Chiquita," he went on without heeding her, "I could not wait until morning, and came to tell you again that

I believe in you — that I love you — that nothing but death can separate us in this life!"

She saw and felt the uselessness of struggling against his great strength and will, so she relaxed her efforts and became quite passive in his arms, her face cast down. Besides, it seemed as though all her strength had left her. She trembled so violently and felt so weak that she must have sunk to the ground had he not supported her.

"Sweetheart!" he cried more passionately than ever. "What do we care for the world? Look up and say you will come with me!" Her soul thrilled with the rapture his words caused her.

"Jack," she said at length, raising her head and looking up into his face, "I love you too much to do that. Not until my name has been cleared —" They heard a rustling sound on the other side of the tamarisk. Another moment, and the long, plumy sprays parted and Don Felipe stepped into the pathway. His face was ashen pale and wore the look of a thoroughly desperate man.

"Captain Forest," he began, breaking the painful silence that ensued, "I have vowed that you shall never marry her. I give you one more chance," and he raised his right arm and pointed toward the gate. "Go, while there is yet time!" he commanded, his voice vibrant with passion. "Go back to the *Posada* at once and saddle your horse and leave the country this very night. If you do not —"

"You think to intimidate me?" interrupted the Cap-

tain, quietly releasing Chiquita from his arms and confronting him.

"Once more — will you go?" demanded Don Felipe in a harsh, fierce voice.

"No!" answered the Captain.

"Then your blood be upon your own head!" he cried, and without a moment's warning, he drew a long knife from his inner breast pocket and rushed furiously upon him.

"Coward, to attack an unarmed man!" cried the Captain, springing aside just in time to avoid his thrust. Without replying, Don Felipe whirled with the swiftness of a cat and rushed at him again. The Captain glanced hurriedly about him in search of some weapon of defense. Close at hand he espied a small, fragile, gilt chair that had been left there by chance during the day. Seizing it by the back with both hands he raised it aloft and aimed a swift blow at his adversary, but the latter cleverly dodged it by dropping on one knee. The chair crashed to the ground with terrific force, its fragments flying in all directions.

Captain Forest was a wonderfully active man for his size. Before Don Felipe was on his feet again, he sprang forward and seized his right arm. The two men grappled desperately for some moments, but what was Don Felipe in the hands of a giant. Suddenly the knife went whirling back over the Captain's shoulder, forming a glittering half-circle in the moonlight as it fell among the flowers. Then Captain Forest lifted Don Felipe with both hands as easily as he would have lifted a

child and hurled him violently to the ground several feet away. A smothered cry of pain escaped him.

"Lie there, dog!" said the Captain, contemptuously.

"Not so, Captain Forest — we're not done yet!" answered Don Felipe, rising with difficulty on one knee. From his hip pocket he drew a pistol.

"Don Felipe Ramirez!" came Chiquita's voice, ringing clear; but he did not heed the warning. Instantly her hand went to her breast and there were two almost simultaneous shots. Don Felipe sprang into the air with a loud cry, alighting upright upon both feet. He gasped, staggered forward a pace, and then sank down on his knees. Again he gasped, clutched desperately at his heart with his left hand, and then, with a last supreme effort, slowly raised his weapon with his trembling hand and once more took aim at the Captain. There was another quick flash and report, and Don Felipe Ramirez lay dead on the ground between them.

In silence they gazed at one another across Don Felipe's body. The Captain was about to speak when they were startled by a low moan just behind them, and, turning, they saw Blanch sink slowly to the bench in a sitting posture, her head resting on her arm across the back of the bench. In an instant they were at her side.

"Blanch!" cried the Captain in consternation at the sight of the blood that was oozing slowly from her left side, and which Chiquita was vainly endeavoring to stanch with her handkerchief. At the sound of his voice, she slowly opened her eyes.

"Forgive me," she whispered in an almost inaudible tone, as they knelt on either side of her, supporting her.

"They were startled by a low moan and saw Blanch sink slowly to the bench."

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For some moments she lay quite motionless, then a slight tremor passed through her and with a little sigh like that of a child's, her head slipped down upon Chiquita's breast. The bullet which Don Felipe had intended for the Captain had passed through her heart; the penalty she paid for giving the signal in the *patio*.

The moonlight fell full across her face, which, contrary to what one might suppose, wore an expression of peace and calm, almost a smile, like one in a dream.

"How beautiful she is!" murmured Chiquita, holding her tenderly in her arms.

"Would to God she had been spared!" answered the Captain, his voice choking with emotion. Yet each felt as they gazed on her upturned face, whose expression was rather that of sleep than of death, that she was better off thus; for what did life hold for her?

XXXVI

FOR most men death ends all things, but for those whose souls are illumined by the unquenchable flame of faith, death is but the beginning of life.

The news of the tragedy, following swift upon that of Juan Ramon's death, spread like wildfire, fairly taking the people's breath away, and throwing the community into a tumult of excitement. Not since the days when the victorious American armies had entered Mexico and laid waste the land, had there been such a commotion in the old town.

The community was shaken to its center. What would happen next? Old women paused in the midst of their chatter and, crossing themselves, said an extra *ave* as a protection against the Evil One; for no one knew who would be taken next.

Don Felipe Ramirez, the handsomest and wealthiest and most influential man in Chihuahua, dead — at the hand of a woman — an Indian!

Most people admitted that he had merited death. That his end was a just punishment for his misdeeds, but then, had it not been for the woman who had wrecked his life, how different his end might have been!

Juan Ramon would be missed for a day at the gaming tables, but the beautiful American Señorita — why should she have paid the price of blood? It was too

much. The popular outburst was tremendous, quite beyond Padre Antonio's influence or control. The evil and tragedy which the witch seemed to draw with her in her train far outweighed the good she had accomplished since her advent in the town. And if the grand Señor, Captain Forest, of an alien race, still chose to remain in the place, why, let him look to his personal safety if he still set store upon his life.

Such was popular sentiment, and out of the countless maledictions that were heaped upon the dark woman and the man she had bewitched, there grew that sullen and ominous silence of presentiment like that preceding a storm, and which boded but one end to them both — death.

José and Dick were the first to apprise the Captain of the true state of affairs, although he had not remained insensible to the threatening looks and dark, sullen faces that greeted him on every hand.

"The place has become too hot to hold you, old man," said Dick. "You and Chiquita had better go somewhere for a little *pasear*. You'll find the air in the mountains more salubrious than here; in fact — *vamos*, as the Spaniards say. Go to Padre Antonio's house at once," he continued. "It's a sort of a sanctuary, you know; you'll be safe there to-day. If you value your life, don't set foot outside the place, and I'd even be chary about picking flowers in the garden," he added in his droll way. "To-night, José and I will have your horses ready and waiting for you in the cañon at the foot of the trail which leads to the top of the *mesa* overlooking the valley. You must get away under

cover of the dusk before the moon rises. Old Manuela will give you the signal when to depart."

"Dick, you are the most ingenious mortal in the world," answered the Captain. "You are as good as a mother to me. How did you ever think of it?"

"Oh! don't thank me," returned Dick. "I didn't think of it; I never have any ideas. It's José's plan entirely."

"The deuce! It does sound like you, *camarada!*" he ejaculated, turning to José who had smoked his *cigarillo* in silence while listening to Dick's words. "The scheme sounds well," he continued after some moments' reflection. "And yet it seems to me you have overlooked something — the most important thing of all."

"What?" asked Dick.

"How are you going to get the horses there without attracting attention? It's just possible that the entire populace might escort you there and then hang all four of us when Chiquita and I arrive."

"Ah! I never thought of that," replied Dick, flicking the ash from his cigar and exchanging glances with José. "I always said you had the imagination of a poet, Jack. But it takes an Indian to think of such things; the horses are concealed already in the cañon, a quarter of a mile from the trail."

"*Si, Capitan.* I took them there last night," said José.

"Last night?"

"Yes. You see, it was this way. I saw the fight last night —"

"You did?"

"*Si, Capitan.* It was a glorious fight, the greatest fight I ever saw. I followed Don Felipe last night and surely would have killed him had I not seen the Señorita draw her weapon. I knew that it was her right to kill him."

"You observe José's exquisite sense of discrimination," interrupted Dick. "It's the etiquette of the land," he added with a twinkle in his eye, his face betraying not so much as the suggestion of a smile. Captain Forest could have laughed at Dick's irresistible humor were it not for the terrible tragedy which rested heavily upon him.

"Well," continued José, "while you and the Señorita stood beside the beautiful *Americana*, I bethought me that it was about time we were leaving this place. You did not know that the two women, Manuela and Juana, and the Padre's gardener, Sebastiano, also witnessed the shooting. I told Sebastiano to get the Señorita's horse out of the stable at once and wait outside in the shadow of the wall on the far side of the garden until I returned. I then hurried back here and got away unobserved with our horses, picking up the Señorita's and Sebastiano on the way to the cañon where I left them in the latter's charge. They will hardly be missed to-day, I think," he added; "the excitement is too great. Go now quietly to Padre Antonio's and wait there until Manuela gives you the word to depart." José paused. Then casting a quick glance about him, he took a fresh puff at his *cigarillo* and said: "Until then, *á Dios*, Señor *Capitan!*" and assuming an indif-

ferent air, as though nothing unusual had occurred, he sauntered quietly away.

"That man's a genius!" said Dick, looking after him until he disappeared around the corner of the house.

"It was a lucky day for you when you picked him up. If you get away at all to-night, you'll owe your lives to him. Nothing but his wits could have saved you. You had better be going now," he added. "Go directly to the Padre's and attract as little attention as possible on the way.

"*Este noche, amigo mio* — to-night, my friend," he concluded in Spanish, and turning, lounged carelessly through the doorway into the house.

XXXVII

"I HEAR nothing," said José, rising from the ground where he had been lying flat with his ear close to the earth.

"They have given us up!" exclaimed the Captain, turning in the saddle and addressing Chiquita who also had been scanning their back trail in the effort to discover a sign of their lost pursuers.

"We have tired them out," she answered, lowering her hand from her eyes.

They had escaped — they were free. Padre Antonio had married them on the afternoon of the previous day.

"If I am still alive, and God grant that it may be so," he said on parting, "I shall see you next spring when I visit the Missions in the North."

The flight had been a swift and perilous one. They had traveled the entire night and day, pausing only long enough to allow their horses short breathing spells and time to slake their thirst at the springs and streams they encountered in their flight. Like their horses, all three were thoroughly tired, and their clothes torn and dust begrimed.

"We'll camp yonder, José," said the Captain, pointing to a thick group of pines that grew on the opposite side of the stream on whose bank they had halted. They had arrived at the foot of the Sierra Madres from whose

side the stream burst and along whose banks their trail led to the upper world where it dropped down again on the other side of the great mountainous divide into Sonora.

"It's like the old days!" cried Chiquita, laughing as they splashed through the stream to the opposite bank, the water rising to their saddle-girths. Drawing rein at the outer rim of the pines, they dismounted and removed their saddles and packs, the latter consisting of a pair of blankets apiece and a week's rations equally distributed among them; coffee, sugar, bacon, beans and flour and a few necessary utensils. These they carried into the center of the grove and deposited in a circle on the ground.

José led away the horses and while he was occupied in picketing them, the Captain gathered an armful of dry wood for the fire, and then picking up a canvas bucket, strolled to the river and filled it with water.

Chiquita had already lit the fire when he returned. She filled the coffee pot with water, cut some slices of bacon and tossed them into a pan which she placed on the fire and then began to mix some flour and water. The Captain leaned against the trunk of one of the trees and rolling a cigarette, lit it, watching her the while. Chiquita laughed softly, but said nothing while engaged in the process of bread-making. This homely touch of camp-life told plainer than words how thoroughly they had come down to earth and again were facing the wholesome realities of life. When the dough was of the right consistency, she molded it into biscuits, placed them in a deep pan, and raking some coals from

the fire, set the pan upon them, also depositing some coals on the top of the cover. After giving the bacon a final turn in the pan, she set it to one side close to the fire where it would keep warm.

She then rose to her feet and stood erect. As she did so, one of the great strands of her hair which had become loosened during their flight, fell in a soft curling mass of blue jet down her back to within a few inches of her ankles. Captain Forest did not know then that it was a sign of her royal lineage.

Once upon a time in the dim past, so far back that nobody could remember when it had occurred, a Tewana woman had given birth to a beautiful girl child with wonderful hair in the same year that a wandering star with a great tail had appeared in the heavens. The coincidence seemed nothing short of miraculous to the people. The Sachems of the tribe pronounced the child to be consecrated and chosen to rule over them by the gods. So it had been decreed, and ever since then, all Tewana women who had ruled over the people had possessed this distinctive mark of their royal lineage and bore the name, "Flaming Star."

Chiquita crossed over to where the Captain still stood leaning against the tree and, pausing before him, looked up into his face and said: "What are you thinking of, Sweetheart?" He flung his arms about her and kissed her.

"I am still wondering," he answered, "how it all happened. It seems so strange, and yet so natural."

"Just what I, too, have been thinking," she returned.

"And yet it is no more remarkable than what our entire lives have been. It could not be otherwise."

"No," he replied. "I would not have it different for worlds. It's just as it should be — just as it has been decreed."

"Come!" she said, leading him over to where her pack lay on the ground. "I've got something for you," and kneeling on the ground, she began unrolling her blankets, out of which she took a small package which, on being opened, contained two pairs of beautifully beaded moccasins; one pair of which she handed to him.

"It's just like you, Chiquita *mia!*" he exclaimed. "I always wear them in camp, but in the hurry to get away, I forgot mine. I'm glad I forgot them though," he added, holding up the moccasins and admiring them. "How did you come to think of them?"

"I can't say," she answered. "One afternoon about a month ago while at the *Posada*, I noticed your footprint in the gravel path in the garden where you had been talking to the girls but a few moments before. Things, as you know, were rather uncertain then, nevertheless, something impelled me to take the measure and make them; thinking that possibly you might want them some day. Besides, it was such sweet work, you know," she added with a little laugh.

"Chiquita — you're a wonderful woman! You not only seem to be able to do everything, but you think of everything as well," and kneeling on the ground before her, he drew off her riding boots and slipped her moccasins on her feet.

"It is the bridal gift of an Indian girl to her hus-

band," she said caressingly. "And signifies that they shall tread the same path together through life."

"What could be more beautiful!" he returned, pulling off his boots and drawing on his own. "Ah!" he continued, "it was worth waiting for you Chiquita *mia!* The long years of uncertainty and suffering seem as nothing, now that I look back upon them and you have come into my life."

Just then José returned from the work of picketing the horses and the three sat down to supper.

XXXVIII

"ISN'T it strange how easily one can return to the natural life if one has known it before?" said Chiquita later in the evening, as the three lay stretched on their blankets around the small fire which José had kindled in the center of the grove, and watched the flickering flames and dancing shadows against the dark pine boughs surrounding them.

"The life of yesterday has fallen from me," she continued, gazing pensively into the fire whose red glare illumined her beautiful bronze features.

"Yes, you are an Indian once more, Chiquita *mia*," said the Captain.

"Ah! you are as much of an Indian as José or myself!" she retorted gayly. "What a pity you didn't know the life before the land was conquered and tamed by the White man! Verily, a glory has passed from this earth!" A peculiar light shone in José's eyes as he listened to her words. He seemed on the point of speaking, but did not. He smiled and rolled a fresh *cigarillo*, lighting it with a pine twig which he took from the fire.

"Tell me why you insisted on our coming this way, Chiquita?" asked the Captain, disposing himself comfortably on his blanket.

"Because I want to see my people again. They are the strongest and most advanced people in Mexico, and we will be safe with them until things have quieted down. Because I wanted you to see where I came from and how I lived before Padre Antonio introduced me to a new world and made of me a woman that you could love. Besides, we can start from their country on our camping trip as well as from any other place. My people are not quite the savages you probably think them. But there is something else," she continued after a pause. "I was impelled, drawn this way. Why, I can not say, but something always kept pointing me toward the northwest. I feel as though the climax of our lives is yet to come; that we are on the verge of something great; that our work in life may begin with them."

"Perhaps it may be so!" interrupted José, no longer able to conceal the agitation her words aroused in him. "That is, if the vision of the White Cloud prove to be true. At any rate, my people await your coming," he added. At the mention of the White Cloud, Chiquita sat bolt upright, regarding José intently the while — then rose to her feet.

"The White Cloud? Your people?" she repeated excitedly. "Then you are a Tewana?" José also had risen from his sitting posture, and dropping on one knee with face downward and both arms extended straight out before him with the palms of the hands turned downward, he exclaimed in the Tewana tongue: "Princess, Flaming Star — I greet you! I am Onakipo, the Pine Tree, son of Ixlao, the Swan!" José's attitude and manner of speech formed a most

striking picture. He had not even revealed his true identity to the Captain.

Chiquita had noticed the furtive, stolen glances he had cast at her from time to time during the journey, a thing strange in an Indian, and it caused her some uneasiness, but now she understood. He had just acknowledged her by his attitude of submission and the salute common to his people, as their tribal head.

"You and I, Princess, were the sole survivors of that last battle in which your father's band was annihilated," continued José in Spanish, seating himself once more on the ground on the other side of the fire opposite Chiquita who again had taken her place beside the Captain.

"I do not wonder that you did not recognize me," he went on after a pause, during which he rolled and lit a fresh *cigarillo*. "I was a mere boy at the time. The battle, you will remember, took place just before sunset, and when the enemy charged our camp, I was struck on the head, as you see by the scar over my left eye. I fell over a ledge of rock into a gully below, alighting in a thick clump of bushes, breaking my fall and saving my life. Fortunately the bushes concealed me from view, causing the enemy to overlook me, else they certainly had finished me before departing. I lay unconscious all that night until noon of the following day, when I awoke. For a long time after awakening I was too weak to rise, but finally I managed to crawl to the little stream that ran at the bottom of the gully just below me. There I slaked my thirst and washed

my face and wound and bound it up as best I could. All that afternoon I lay by the stream, drinking and dipping my head in the water until evening, when I regained sufficient strength to crawl back to the top of the great rock where we made our last stand.

"There, a ghastly sight met my eyes. With his back against a large bowlder where the enemy had placed him, sat your father, the Whirlwind, still dressed in his war regalia and around him, just as they had fallen, lay our dead comrades. I counted them. There were forty-eight in all, and as you were not among the dead, I rightly conjectured, as it soon afterward proved, that you had been taken prisoner. Three weeks later I succeeded in reaching our people and told the news. A war party was organized immediately, and I guided it back to the land of the Ispali where after a battle, we learned of your capture and escape from several of the Ispali whom we succeeded in capturing.

"That was ten years ago, and ever since then, we have sent out runners each year to visit the towns and villages throughout the land in the hope of finding you and bringing you back again to rule over us; for as you know, Princess, you are the last of the royal blood. But in vain. In spite of the fact that the White Cloud, our great Sachem, said you were still alive, that he repeatedly saw you among the living in his visions and predicted your return, we found no trace of you. That was because we had overlooked Santa Fé. It lies so far east of our country that it escaped our notice. We never imagined that you had crossed the Sierra Madres

in your flight, and had I not chanced to enter the Captain's service, we probably never would have heard of you again.

"But now I understand that it was so intended — that the time was not yet ripe. That the Great Spirit had ordained you should not return to your people until you had become worthy of the charge which is about to be conferred upon you, and which, as you shall presently learn, goes to prove the truth of the subsequent prophecies the White Cloud made concerning you." He paused and for some minutes gazed silently into the fire. He had accompanied his narrative with intense, dramatic gestures and expressions illustrative of its incidents; a characteristic common to his race. Presently a smile lit up his face and looking up once more, he resumed.

"You remember, Princess, how the White Cloud counseled us to accept the terms of the Government, bad though they were, and make peace, and prophesied that disaster would befall us if we refused. Well, then as now, events have proved the truth of his words. As the years went by and no further trace of you could be found, the people lost hope of ever seeing you again and said you were dead. But the White Cloud maintained that you were still alive; that the day of your return was drawing ever nearer; that he heard the song of birds and the sound of laughing waters and beheld the desert carpeted with flowers in his vision and you in their midst coming towards them, which typified the renewal of life and rebirth of the nation. But when he announced that he always saw you in the company

of a white man who later should rule over us, they laughed at his prophecies.

"'A white man rule over the Tewana? How absurd — impossible!' They shook their heads and said: 'The White Cloud is old — his vision has become dim, impaired through age!'"

The Captain and Chiquita were too amazed by José's words to venture a reply, and sat gazing alternately at one another and then at the speaker.

"When I first met the Captain," continued José, "I wondered greatly why I was so drawn toward him. True, he was a man to my liking and I was doubly grateful to him for saving my life, but that did not wholly account for my attachment. I was drawn to him irresistibly as by an invisible power. I could not leave him; and when I again saw you, Princess, on the day that you and the beautiful Señorita met for the first time and heard from your own lips who you were as well as your avowal of love for my Master, I knew then that the White Cloud had read rightly the future; that my Master, the Grand Señor, had been chosen by the Great Spirit to rule with you over our people.

"It was then that I learned how you had come to Padre Antonio, after which I returned to our people and told them what I knew; that I had found not only you, but also the White Chief whom the White Cloud had seen in his vision, and that, if you returned to them at all, it would surely be as his bride. At first they would not believe me, but when I persisted and reminded them of the disasters that had befallen us in the past for our failure to heed the White Cloud's councils, they

at last yielded and called a grand council and decided to send a deputation composed of the leading men of the nation to verify my statements.

"It was not so much the news that you were still alive that was so difficult for them to believe, but that a white man should rule over them — a thing impossible and past all belief; besides, they would not have it. However, when I conducted the deputation, consisting of six of our leading men, to Santa Fé and they secretly beheld you, Princess, they one and all exclaimed as with one breath: 'Tis she, the Princess — the Flaming Star! How like her father, the Whirlwind, she is!'

"They wanted to disclose their identity to you then and there and exhort you to return with them to your people, but I persuaded them to wait, reminding them that the White Cloud's prophecy was not yet entirely fulfilled. I then showed you to them, Master," he went on, addressing the Captain, "and although they acknowledged that you were a magnificent specimen of a man and had the appearance of one born to command, they shook their heads and said it was impossible — that a White Chief could never rule over the Tewana.

"'Of a truth,' I answered, 'the black-robed Padres are right! You are a stiff-necked people who persist in following in the footsteps of our forefathers who, we all know, were unable to lead the people to the light. Only the White Cloud was able to foresee the future; grasp the significance of both the Padres' and our ancient Sachems' teachings. That the old order of things had come to an end. That the time had come when strife

must cease among men; that the tidings were now to be fulfilled which the White Child with a face like the sun had brought to the world, and whose coming our ancient Sachems had predicted in the ancient days. Know also, that the Princess has seen the great world which you have not seen; that in many ways she is more like a white woman than one of our race; that she is wiser than you are; that the Great Spirit has shown her the things that are good for us, and if she becomes the wife of the White Chief, you must accept him if you accept her, for without him she will never return to you. Besides, the White Chief is the wisest of us all. In his sight both we and most of the men of his own race are as children.'

"They could not find a fitting answer to my words and returned to our people. Ever since then runners have been coming and going constantly between us. They have been apprised of our coming and await us." José ceased speaking and sat gazing meditatively into the fire where he watched the pink and violet flames leap upward and lose themselves in the thin wreath of white smoke which slowly ascended and floated away over the tree tops. For some time no one spoke, then Captain Forest finally broke the silence.

"What you say, José, is truly wonderful; but know, that we have no more desire to rule the Tewana than to rule other men. But should they, like the rest of the world, fail to heed our example, they shall perish in their ignorance." He leaned forward and tossed some fresh sticks of wood on the fire.

"It is time for the first watch, José," he continued,

rising to his feet and glancing up at the stars visible above the tree tops. "Call me when the Great Bear has half circled the Pole Star. I'll keep the second watch."

XXXIX

JOSÉ brought in the horses and he and the Captain saddled and packed them; after which they silently broke camp in the light of the stars and the waning moon. José took his place at the head of the little cavalcade, Chiquita following him and the Captain bringing up the rear; he and Chiquita casting a last look at their first camp as they rode away.

No one spoke. Save for the measured tread of the horses and noise of the rushing stream along which the trail led upwards, no sounds disturbed the silence of the night. Now and then an occasional spark, struck from the horses' iron-rimmed hoofs, flashed for an instant in the darkness along the trail.

The Captain's gaze was riveted upon Chiquita's tall, erect figure in front of him who ever and anon turned in the saddle and smiled, her beautiful, lustrous eyes flashing like stars in the moon-fire.

Higher and higher they mounted, pausing occasionally to allow the horses time to draw breath, until they at length drew rein on the summit of the Sierra Madres. Here a wonderful sight met their eyes, poised as they were upon the rim of the earth and gazing off into star-strewn space. Dawn was just breaking, suffusing the long line of the eastern horizon with a soft, rosy

glow which crept swiftly towards them over the gray-green, purple plains that swept away from the mountains' base like vast undulating stretches of ocean; the golden shafts of the on-coming dawn driving the paling stars before them like a shepherd his flocks to the hills. North and south, as far as the eye could reach, stretched the broken and many crested length of the great Sierra Madré range; its sides clothed with dark forests of cedar and pine and chaparral, its secluded recesses obscured in the gloom; its highest peaks glowing with golden, pink and violet tints. In the west, surrounded by a host of golden stars that still glittered in the purple black depths of vanishing night, the silver moon hung half-way dipped as it slowly sank behind the towering crest of the Sahuaripa range, an isolated spur of the Sierra Madres. A vast plain intervened between them and the distant Sierras at whose foot dwelt the Tewana.

Far below them, from out the shadowy depths on either side of the range, arose faint sounds of awakening life. The breeze began to sigh among the tree tops, while high above them they heard the wild scream of eagles that soared in great circles with widespread pinions in their morning flight to greet the sun. Great waves of indefinable melody, more subtle and exquisite than music, swept over them, causing their souls to quicken and tingle in the freshening dawn as the Day Star rose to hold again his sway over earth. His mighty splendor and effulgence swept through and over them, their souls vibrating with renewed life and vigor as they felt and recognized God's sign and immanence

as in the days when man first walked with Him in the cool of the morning.

They realized that they had entered upon the new life. The promise was fulfilled — the veil was lifted. The scroll of human destiny seemed to unroll itself from out the dim traditions of the past, and they beheld as in a dream the life that was when first the children of men roamed the earth and established the Kingdom of God which was intended from the beginning. In the picture of the golden childhood of the race, they beheld reflected in the new light of the future, the vision of the emancipated, delivered man, guided by the lessons still to be learned from the great Book of Nature lying open before him, and the accumulated wisdom of past ages, handed down to him by his forefathers through travail and suffering and in legend and song from those ancient days of suns and nights of stars when the earth and man were young. A free-born race of men who are joint tenants of the soil, sharing all things in common with which their bountiful Mother, the Earth, has provided them. A race of men, athletic in body as they are able in mind, and spiritual and courageous, recognizing no laws but those of Nature's or God's.

In silence and with bared heads they gazed upon the grandeur of the scene that lay spread out before them. It was as though they looked back upon the old life from another world. It lay so far behind them that it seemed but a memory; not a vestige of it clung to them, so filled were they with new hopes and aspirations.

"Behold!" cried José excitedly, pointing toward the west. And looking in the direction indicated by his

outstretched arm, they beheld in the dim distance numerous columns of smoke rising heavenward in the clear morning air from the tops of the *mesas* that dotted the plain.

"'Tis the sign of your coming, Princess!" he continued. "The people have bowed to the will of the White Cloud — acknowledged the authority of the White Chief."

Parrakeets began to twitter among the branches of the trees on every hand during their descent of the western slope. Ravens croaked and called from the heart of the forest, and the owl flitted by on silent wing. Black birds with orange heads and throats and splashed with scarlet on their wings, greeted them at the foot of the mountain among the reeds which grew along the stream they were following. Deer broke from the willow copse and bounded away, while grouse rose on whirring wings from under the horses' hoofs as they emerged upon the plain where the wild cry of the curlew rang clear and sharp on the morning. They were free and breathed deep of the spirit of freedom; listened to the old primeval song of nature's myriad voices; gazed long upon the pristine loveliness of earth.

All that day and the three following, the columns of smoke continued to rise heavenward as they pursued their journey. At night, pillars of fire took the place of the smoke, and all the while, save for an occasional glimpse in the distance of a solitary horseman who faded specterlike from view on their approach, they saw not a soul.

The Spirit of the Great Mystery brooded over the

land, and they rode as in a dream. The fragrant cedar and piñon-scented smoke mingled with the soft, thin haze of the Indian summer which veiled the land in its golden glow of mystery; the sacred incense, the Red men say, of the gods, burned on their altars in ancient days; a sign to the people to gather each year on the hilltops and *mesas*, and in the forests and plains during the moon of falling leaves, and celebrate in prayer and sacred dance and song, the advent of the gods.

The wind was hushed and all things seemed to sleep and dream, and they seemed to draw nearer to the heart of things. The great change that had come into their lives was, after all, no more wonderful than the changes which they saw had taken place in nature about them. A luxuriant growth of tropical vegetation, succeeded by vast forests of conifers, a remnant of which still survived upon the mountains, once flourished in the semi-desert through which they traveled. An occasional broken, half-buried pillar, or the remains of a crumbling wall that had witnessed the passing of the ages and listened to the tales borne on the winds, marked the existence of vanished civilizations of which men to-day know naught. All things appeared to change and fade, nothing seemed permanent, not even the ideal; the morrow was but a forgetting.

Beneath them they felt the Earth, ponderous and weighty and crushing in its immensity to the imagination, and whose existence seemed of little moment in comparison to the countless worlds that filled the universe about them. Yet, insignificant though it appeared, was it not a link in the great universal scheme of mat-

ter, and did it not stand in the same relation to the universe as their individual lives to the human race?

Like two stars their souls had rushed together from the uttermost confines of space. She had been led into his world, and he compelled to retrace his steps to almost primitive conditions in order that they might find one another and together take up the thread of their common destiny. Clearly, they were children of destiny upon whose brows God had set His seal. They realized that the path which lay before them was not one entirely strewn with flowers. That between the chosen ones, life meant something more than the love of a man for a woman, or a woman's for a man. That they still stood with their feet in the flame; that earth's cup of joy for them must still remain one of bittersweet; that they must go on to the end in order that men might see and hear; that the new order of things must spring from them.

Gay was the Princess. She laughed and talked and related incidents of her life and her people; the silvery tinkle of the bells on her spurs, accompanying every movement of her horse, chimed sweetly with her mood. In the raven folds of her blue-black hair, she wore again the red berries as on the day when first he beheld her. She seemed a part of that tawny landscape, splashed with great patches of crimson and gold and gray and purple — the spirit and incarnation of the Indian summer.

As he gazed upon her and listened to her words, the wild refrain of those familiar lines recurred to him:

"I will wed some savage woman; she shall rear my dusky race:
Iron-jointed, supple-sinewed, they shall dive and they shall run,
Catch the wild goat by the hair, and hurl their lances in the sun,
Whistle back the parrot's call,—leap the rainbows of the brooks,—"

The woman of the ages had come back again. Lilith and Eve and Isis and Venus, the foam-kissed, and Erda, the dreaming one. The vision of the ancient world rose before him; virgin forests and plains and mighty rivers and mountains; the ancient temples of the Nile and the Ganges, Hellas' fanes and Druidic monoliths and sacred groves, and voices of strange peoples mingled with the soft notes of reed and lute.

Within the unending circle of life and death, of love and hatred, of joy and sorrow and remorse which mark the rise and passing of the civilizations, he beheld the sacred ash and pine, and starry lotus afloat upon the face of moonlit waters in which were mirrored the palm and papyrus and acanthus, and stood face to face with the serpent and wolf, the winged horse and sphinx, and the dragon and the griffin when their secret origins and significance were known unto men. The sounds of harps and cymbals and lyres and timbrels blended with those of conch-shells and antelope horns. Sighs and laughter and curses and weeping mingled with the wild strains of Homeric song and mystic rites of Chaldea and Babylon, and the sacred chant of Isis. The Voodoo danced to the rattle of shells and antelope hoofs before the shrines of Ethiopia's dark woman, crowned with the sickle moon, and vast multitudes knelt and lay prostrate before the car of Juggernaut and the passing image of Pracriti

of Asia, the many-breasted, the Goddess of Abundance.

Sun and Fire worshipers tore the hearts and scalps from living victims and held them aloft to the rising sun, and men and wild beasts fought in arenas amid the acclamations of the people.

He beheld the milk-white bullocks of the Druid, garlanded with flowers, heading the procession that entered the dark groves in search of the sacred mistletoe-bearing oak; the processions of Pan and Odin, and Siva and Vishnu and Baal, and Venus and Bacchus. Nymphs and fauns and dryads and hamadryads called from the depths of the forest, and youths and maidens and shepherds with vine-wreathed brows danced in the sunlit glades and on the hills where the white flocks roamed, to the plaintive notes of the mystic pipes of Pan. He beheld the flaunting banners and flashing steel of victorious hosts and heard the wild, weird chants of wandering, barbaric hordes that conquered and destroyed. The flash and roar of artillery of recent times but intensified the gloom that brooded over the world. The struggle was unending. Men still remained the victims and slaves of passion and desire. Their sighs and curses and groans and cries of hatred and despair increased with the years; the smoke of their torment blackened the face of the sun.

The waves of human harmony and discord swept over him like the sounds of mighty rushing winds and waters, and he beheld the race to-day, as in the past, in the plains and on the high tops, prostrate and erect with hands outstretched toward the heavens, crying for release. And yet through it and beneath it and above it

all, he heard a ringing note of triumph that swelled onward and upward until the vision shone clear, and the true import of their lives stood revealed. They had overcome the world; broken the fiery chains of desire.

The heavens of the old world rolled together like a scroll, and the sun and the moon and the stars and the earth fell into the burning sea of man's worldliness, but out of the chaos that followed, the earth emerged once more, green and beautiful, and grain waved upon its face, and the voice of the Angel rang clear, crying aloud and mightily:

"Babylon the Great is fallen, is fallen! Babylon, the woman mounted upon the scarlet beast and arrayed in purple and scarlet color and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, and having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations. . . . Babylon upon whose forehead is written, 'Mystery, Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots and Abominations of the Earth.' Babylon drunk with wine and the blood of those who stood for the truth. Babylon, of whose wine and delights all men have drunk and with whom all the nations of the Earth have committed fornication. Babylon whose sins have reached unto heaven; who hath glorified herself and lived deliciously and who said in her heart: 'I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall know no sorrow; my joy shall continue forever!'

"Her plagues shall come in one day, death and mourning and famine, and she shall be utterly burned with fire. And the kings and the rulers of earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the mighty men, and the chief Captains, and the bondsmen, and the free-

men who have lived deliciously with her and who bear the mark of the beast in their hands and upon their foreheads shall bewail her and lament for her, crying:

"'Alas, alas that great city Babylon, that mighty city!'

"And the merchants of the earth shall weep and mourn over her; for no man buyeth their merchandise any more: The merchandise of gold and silver and precious stones, and of pearls and fine linen, and purple, and silk and scarlet, and all thyine wood, and all manner vessels of ivory, and all manner vessels of most precious wood, and of brass and iron and marble. And cinnamon, and odours, and ointments, and frankincense, and wine, and oil, and fine flour, and wheat, and beasts, and sheep, and horses, and chariots, and slaves, and souls of men. . . .

"The fruits that thy soul lusted after are departed from thee, and all things which were dainty and goodly are departed from thee, and thou shalt find them no more at all. The merchants of these things which were made rich by her shall stand afar off . . . weeping and wailing and saying: 'Alas, alas that great city, that was clothed in fine linen and purple and scarlet, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls. . . .' And every ship master and all the company in ships, and sailors, and as many as trade by sea . . . shall cry when they see the smoke of her burning, saying: 'What city is like unto this great city?' And they shall cast dust on their heads, and weeping and wailing, cry: 'Alas, alas that great city, wherein were made rich all that had ships in the sea by reason of her costliness!'

"Babylon, Babylon, thine idols and graven images of gods shall be cast down and shattered utterly and forever! The voice of harpers, and musicians, and of pipers, and trumpeters shall be heard no more at all in thee; and no craftsman of whatsoever craft he be shall be found any more in thee; and the sound of a millstone shall be heard no more at all in thee; and the light of a candle shall shine no more at all in thee; and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be heard no more at all in thee; for thy merchants were the great men of the earth; for by thy sorceries were all nations of the earth deceived!"

Babylon, Babylon, thou fair city, thou proud world, thou wonderful emanation of men's minds, thou fair wanton, thou beauteous licentious harlot of gold and gems, and white linen, and silks, and of henna, and myrrh, and frankincense, and sweet-smelling herbs, no more shall thy sons and daughters rejoice in thee and worship thee! Thy grass shall be withered and thy fig trees shall cast their figs, and thy gold and silver, and thy diamonds, and rubies, and sapphires, and turquoise, and emeralds, and opals, and pearls, and topaz, shall lie scattered and in heaps for him to take who wisheth them, but none shall desire them.

No more shall thy daughters sit in the shadow of thy vines where nesteth the dove, and glorify thee in idle jest and laughter and song, and longingly wait for the coming of the night, for they shall be bereft of their silks, and their girdles, and anklets, and bracelets of gold and jewels. Thy songs and pæans of triumph and victory shall cease with the tainted stream of thy desires,

and the walls of thy temples shall crumble to dust. Thy stars shall pale, and the sun and the moon shall illumine thee no longer, for the day approacheth when thy blandishments shall fail to allure.

Babylon, Babylon, thou proud city, thou who sitteth upon many waters, thou whose sway encompasseth the earth, how hast thou fallen!

XL

ON the afternoon of the fifth day they drew rein on a high, shelving, terracelike stretch of ground overlooking a broad valley, and almost opposite the chief Tewana village which nestled at the foot of the Sahuaripa range, running north and south until lost on the horizon.

Back of the village a cataract flung itself downward over the mountain's side into the valley, its clouds of spray reflecting innumerable rainbow tints in the sunshine. Great forests, abounding in wild animal life, clothed the mountain's slopes.

It was a peaceful, fruitful valley upon which they gazed; the land where Chiquita formerly dwelt. The grass grew knee-deep in the meadows. Willows and water-birch and sycamore and alders and poplars, interspersed with pines and oaks, grew in clusters along the banks of the broad, rushing stream that ran between them and the distant village whose low, vine-clad walls glowed golden and rose and purple and gray in the rays of the afternoon sun. The diminutive city was a mass of trees and foliage and seemed a part of the landscape; so small were the houses and so harmonious its setting. Fields of flax and melons, and beans and squash, and corn and tobacco, and small orchards and vineyards already harvested, dotted the valley close to

the meadows which bordered the tree-fringed stream. Herds of horses and cattle and flocks of sheep and goats, intermingled with wild herds of deer and antelope, browsed on the meadows and slopes above the river where they stood. Wild ducks and geese and swan swam in the river, and grouse and wild turkeys and quail and plover roamed the forests and uplands. There was no promiscuous killing of wild animals allowed among the Tewana; they were shared in common like the domesticated animals. Innumerable canoes, used for fishing, were drawn up on the banks of the river.

The Tewana were an independent, self-supporting people. At all seasons of the year were heard the sounds of the hand-loom and the smith's anvil — the fashioners of iron and precious metals. The weavers of cloth and baskets, and potters and tanners fashioned their wares in the open in the shade of their walls and trees.

The life these people led, free from the harassing cares and anxieties of the White man, was almost ideal. During the spring and summer months they tended their fields, and after the harvests were gathered in the autumn and the surplus produce stored in public granaries, they engaged in the chase; hunting only with the bow and spear — camping in the open, in the forests and plains until the advent of winter. During the ensuing months, until the coming of spring, the children were instructed by their parents in the industrial arts; taught the traditions of their people, and how to read and write, and to observe the courses of the stars and to forecast the weather and predict the nature of the seasons. With the coming of the seedtime, they entered the fields with

their elders and learned to sow and tend and reap the crops.

Thus, by the time the child had attained the age of sixteen, he was thoroughly conversant with all that was necessary to meet the demands of life. He became an independent, self-supporting unit, while his constant contact with nature not only revealed the latter's secrets and the laws governing natural phenomena, but developed him physically and spiritually as only nature can. All orphaned children were adopted by the different families, and consequently, there were no outcasts or poor and ignorant among the people.

Every house was surrounded by a small plot of ground sufficient to supply the family with fruit, poultry, grain and vegetables; from two to three acres in extent. Their herds were held in common and permitted to run at will like the deer; requiring but little care.

The Tewana only produced enough to feed and clothe themselves. The use of money was forbidden among them, and trade and barter limited practically to the individual who, desiring something particular from his neighbor, procured the latter an equivalent in return.

They regarded material things as merely a means to an end, and considered it a disgrace for any one to accumulate wealth; for it was noted that one's spiritual development declined in the same ratio that his material possessions increased. Like the land, they held the forests and minerals and waters and animals in common. These were the sacred things, the gift of nature, and could not be bartered or sold. In their eyes, only the depraved soul of a peddler ever could have conceived the

idea of turning them into merchandise. Naturally it had taken centuries of evolution to create this attitude — but they had attained. There was, however, no need of wealth. Since they enjoyed the earth's natural resources in common, there was enough and an abundance for all; placing the high and the low on a footing of material equality.

Four months' energetic labor was all that was required to produce the annual necessities of life, allowing the individual the greater portion of his days to devote to the development of his natural capacities. There were no idlers, the women sharing the responsibilities of life the same as the men. All contributed their services to that which was required for the good of the community; the maintenance of aqueducts and roads in the towns and the guarding of the herds. Aside from these slight duties, the individual was free to follow the bent of his desires. Those who refused to contribute such services were driven from the community and became nomads, but such instances were rare; all preferring to enjoy the benefits which civilization, combined with the greatest amount of liberty, bestowed upon the individual.

Opposite the chief *pueblo*, on the same side of the river occupied by themselves, stood the ruins of another town in a fair state of preservation. It differed greatly in appearance from the one opposite. It was compactly built, resembling more a modern Mexican town than the pure type of Indian *pueblo*. In answer to the Captain's inquiries concerning it, Chiquita smiled and said: "Originally there were sixty *pueblos*, aver-

aging from two to three thousand inhabitants each; the number of inhabitants to which the size of our towns are limited. Owing to the new ideas that were introduced among us by the priests and traders that were permitted to visit us from time to time, many of our people sought to establish a new order of things; like that prevailing throughout the greater part of the world to-day. But in order that I may make clear what I am about to say, I must first tell you, that the Tewana are as quick to recognize and encourage talent and genius as were the ancient Greeks — that there are many artists among my people who have developed their arts to a high degree of perfection — poets, painters, sculptors and musicians.

"These artists, especially, became imbued with the new ideas, and instead of continuing to create for art's sake only, as had been the custom of their fathers, embellishing their houses and articles of use with their artistic creations, or spreading their poetry and music and national sagas abroad after the manner of the Minnesingers of old, they, with the others who had become affected, began to adopt new customs — to build churches and temples in which to worship and preserve their arts, and sought to introduce money and taxation and all that they entail among the people in order that the new institutions might be maintained.

"The disaffection became widespread, affecting about half the people. The White Cloud and my father did all in their power to persuade the renegades, as they were called, to return to the old ways again; maintaining that God dwelt in the open, not in temples,

and that the works of man which entailed the burden of taxation for their maintenance, depriving man of his freedom, were not worth retaining. That it was not economy, but extravagance to maintain them, and an unnecessary waste of energy; for the instant man, in his material evolution, goes beyond the procuring of the necessities of life, he becomes immeshed in the creations of his own world and a slave to them. But in vain. They refused to listen to the wisdom of their words and only laughed in answer to their pleadings. Whereupon, the most terrible battles ensued; costing the lives of fifty thousand of our best fighting men and women; for among us, the women, like the men, are warriors, and quite as capable of self-defense. They likewise take part in all our games. In fact, they receive the same training in all things as the men in order that they may be equally fitted to bear the responsibilities of citizenship.

"Our women are trained for battle, not particularly to make warriors of them, but for the same reason that the Greeks placed athletics before all else. Not that they considered athletics superior to the other arts and sciences, but without physical perfection, they realized there could be no proper mental poise, no balance between mind and body. When you see our youth, our young men and women, contest for the honors in our games and military exercises you'll realize the truth of this. The entire nation gathers together once a year to witness these sports and exercises and judge the skill of the contestants. No Olympic games ever surpassed them. You shall see wonderfully beau-

tiful men and women, the result of their training. Men and women who grow naturally from the ground up, like the tree or the flower. Believe me, your people don't know what it is to really live, to taste of the true joys of life; they only exist.

"Owing to the terrific loss we sustained during the rebellion, we were forced to make terms with the Mexican Government and pay an annual tribute like the rest of her people. It was my first introduction to battle. I don't think I shall ever forget those terrible days of slaughter. No quarter was shown, for we knew that defeat meant the extermination of our race. There ought to be about a hundred thousand of us left," she continued. "Twenty *pueblos* in all were destroyed, and may their ruins long continue to stand as monuments of the folly of men!"

"But how about your schools and hospitals and asylums and prisons?" asked the Captain.

"Men who lead natural lives have no need of such things," she answered. "Nature is all sufficient and has provided all things for man's proper development. The man or woman who can not instruct a child in the things that are worth knowing and necessary to meet the demands of life, is a barbarian and only half civilized. Once a man becomes civilized, the civilizing process ends. A man's spiritual growth is not dependent upon his inventions, his sciences or his arts, but is a thing apart from mental growth. If this were not so, his hope of ultimate deliverance would be a delusion. Contagious diseases were unknown to us until introduced among us by white men. As for criminals, they

are very rare among us. When all men have an equal opportunity in life there is no incentive to commit crime. Acts that are the result of sudden fits of passion, are not the acts of criminals, but the righting of a supposed wrong done the individual. But even these are rare. Should any one transgress the law, he is punished, not imprisoned. Only a fool would go to the trouble and expense of keeping a man imprisoned. A delinquent is punished so severely that he will not transgress the law a second time; for a second serious offense against society is punished usually with death. From what I have told you, you can gather that we are not the savages the world imagines men to be who lead a natural existence. You can see how easily we, with our knowledge and theirs, could lead them to the light."

"Is there nothing between the picture your people present and the world we know?"

"Nothing! What else could there be? After the final appraisement of things has been taken and they have been weighed in the balance and adjudged, this is the condition that must confront mankind, for no other condition offers man such unlimited scope for the development of his higher nature. What you see is the true picture of the delivered man. The Golden Age, or the Garden of Eden is no myth. Men once were free and remained so until they gave way to desire and established for themselves a world of delusion in which there is no permanency either of thought or possession. The traditions of all nations and all peoples, from time immemorial, tell of this state when men were

free. They also predict the destruction of present-day society. The Utopias and Golden Ages depicted by poets and dreamers, though beautiful to dwell upon in fancy, are of the tissue of dreams. They will not bear analysis. They are merely other names for different forms of bondage; the same old romantic fallacies which we are forever meeting in works of fiction."

"And how long shall the world we know continue until the new dispensation comes to pass?"

"Until men overcome the fear of death! Then shall they be born anew and come into their rightful heritage. Then shall they grasp the spiritual significance of the Golden Age as voiced by the Prophet: When first the foundations of the Earth were laid; when the morning stars sang together and all the Sons of God shouted for joy, for we are they!"

XLI

ON either side of the village, forming a vast semicircle, stood innumerable lodges and hogans, temporary structures erected by the inhabitants of the other villages who had come to show homage to the Princess and the White Chief, as the Captain was called.

While gazing in the direction of the village which was too far distant for them to distinguish more than an indistinct outline of objects, they beheld two dark columns of horsemen issue forth from the center of the great semicircle of lodges and move slowly in their direction. Chiquita guessed their meaning. As a child she had witnessed the ceremony when her father, the Whirlwind, was proclaimed Chief of the nation.

Without pausing, they came trailing across the valley in two separate columns, thousands of horsemen and women, the men on the right hand, the women on the left; all riding bareback with simple *riatas* twisted around the horse's lower jaw. Save for their sandals and the skins of the panther and ocelot and jaguar, the Mexican leopard, which they wore clasped at the left shoulder by a golden, jeweled clasp, and which fell diagonally down across the body to the right knee, leaving the arms and shoulders and the greater part of the body bare and the left leg exposed to the hip, the women were as naked as the men who wore sandals

and loin-skins only. Heavy clasps and bracelets and girdles of gold and silver, set with pearls and opals, and turquoise and topaz, and emeralds and sapphires, adorned their arms and waists.

Among the Tewana there was no distinction in authority between man and woman. Like the Amazons of old, the women carried long steel-tipped lances and shields and bows and quivers of arrows slung across their backs as did the men. The head of each Cacique or Chieftain of a hundred warriors or Amazons was adorned with a circlet of gold with a clasp of precious stones on the left side of the head holding a single eagle's feather that slanted downward across the left shoulder.

On they came, the half-wild horses prancing and plunging and snorting and neighing, their manes and the long black hair and braids of the men and women flying in the breeze; the lance tips and jewels and their naked, bronze bodies flashing and glistening in the sun; a wonderful, wild, picturesque, barbaric pageant, a voice from the past; magnificent specimens of manhood and womanhood; free men, exemplifying the fullness of life — the life that is worth living. The jewels and precious metals which they wore represented incredible wealth, but were regarded by them as objects of beauty only, for these were the Tewana, the people, who for the sake of freedom, had trampled material wealth under foot; had held Montezuma in check and resisted the encroachments of the Spaniard ever since the days of Cortez, knowing themselves to be a superior people and of more ancient origin.

A wild, weird chant that rolled and swelled in great undulatory waves of melody down the long lines of warriors, was borne to them on the breeze. The whole valley was filled with the song, the hills and mountains, reverberating and resounding, echoed back the refrain.

"'Tis the ancient chant of the kings!" explained Chiquita. "Of course we no longer go to war thus. Nevertheless, it is the ancient rite that must be performed so long as the Tewana remain a nation."

Nearer and nearer drew the advancing host, the volume of sound swelling and increasing, until splashing through the river and sweeping up the slope to where they stood, the leaders drew rein before them, and raising their lances on high, a mighty shout burst from the throats of the warriors, interrupting the song. Again and again the valley and mountains echoed and reverberated with the prolonged shouts and acclamations until the chant was taken up once more.

An eagle with wide-spread wings soared above them in the blue of heaven and seemed to accompany them as they swept along between the lines in the direction of the village; each company of warriors and Amazons, without interrupting the chant, raising their lances in salute as they passed. There was no doubt in the minds of the Tewana regarding Captain Forest's ability to rule as they gazed upon the man and the horse he rode. He was as tall and deep chested as the Whirlwind, while his piercing, hawklike gaze and face shone with the strength and determination of one born to command. The Chestnut tossed his great white mane

in the air and neighed and plunged and curveted between the lines.

Truly the White Cloud had read the future well — the White Chief had come with the Princess.

On they rode, the song and acclamations of the warriors ringing in their ears, their gaze now scanning the faces of these wonderful people, now lifted heavenward to the eagle which floated overhead and continued to accompany them. Their souls thrilled with the exquisite joy of living which the scene and the surroundings inspired in them. A scene which men have dreamed of during moments of spiritual uplift, and have longed to behold and imitate and become a part of, and escape from the sordidness and pettiness of mundane existence and live the life of men where life is life and every breath is freedom; where the desire to live is dominant and the future holds no terrors, and each new day and sun and moon and procession of the stars are greeted with the joy that is born of living and hailed as emblems of the creative force that marks and animates the passing of the seasons.

At the end of the lines, on a slight eminence before the village, in front of a great gathering of aged men and women and children, stood the tall, erect figure of an ancient warrior and patriarch with long, snow-white hair that fell over his shoulders. Like the Amazons, he was clad in a jaguar's skin held in place by a golden girdle and clasps studded with jewels, and wore sandals on his feet. A circlet of gold wrought with runic symbols, to the left side of which was attached a raven's wing, encircled his head, while in his right hand he

held a long willow staff or wand to which were attached seven eagle feathers that fluttered in the breeze.

It was the great Sachem, the White Cloud. A hundred winters sat upon his clear, broad arching brow, and yet the years seemed to rest lightly upon him. His benign, beaming countenance shone with an almost supernatural radiance that bespoke the gift of the seer. Without altering his position, he quietly signed to Chiquita and the Captain to dismount and approach. Meanwhile the warriors had gathered in a great semicircle in front of them. For some time the White Cloud continued to gaze at them in silent scrutiny, his large, dark, piercing eyes roving from Chiquita's face to the Captain's, in the seeming effort to fathom their thoughts and the very depths of their souls, as though to reassure himself of the truth of his prophecy.

"It is done. You have come at last, my children — the prophecy is fulfilled!" he began at length. Then, raising the staff which he held in his right hand and pointing directly upward to where the eagle continued to soar in great circles, he cried in a deep sonorous voice that all might hear: "Behold the sacred bird, God's sign and symbol; the sacred witness to the consecration of His chosen ones! For was it not written in the ancient runes that, after the coming of the White Child with a face like the sun, the ancient spirit of Hiawatha, the Red Man's Messiah, would revisit the world of men once more upon the back of an eagle to verify the truth of those words uttered by the White Child?

"Since the dawn of man's birth the centuries have waited for this day! Henceforth," he continued, ad-

dressing the Captain, "you shall be known unto all men as Soaring Eagle, the Winged Spirit! And you, Flaming Star, as the Giver of Life!" Then, planting the wand upright in the ground between them, he bade them take hold of it; Chiquita with the left hand and the Captain with the right, his hand above hers.

"By the power and sacred symbolism represented by this staff," he continued, "I invest you both with the supreme authority. And further, I call all men to witness that, the hand of Soaring Eagle rests above that of the Giver of Life, which signifies that his word shall outweigh all others in the Councils of the People." He ceased speaking and turned to the Captain as if awaiting his reply.

A prolonged silence ensued, during which the latter's gaze swept the vast conclave of horsemen and forest of lances that glittered in the sunlight and the wild mountains beyond which towered above the valley and had looked down upon the Tewana in the ancient days when *his* race was in the cradle of its infancy. Beside him stood the beauteous woman who seemed endowed with all the wit and graces the poets of the ages had attributed to the ideal woman. An inspiring, uplifting spectacle, far surpassing in its reality the vision of his dreams.

He had attained the goal. The responsibility had been laid upon him, and without hesitation he accepted the charge, and spake; his words being translated by Chiquita, were repeated in turn to the multitude by the White Cloud.

"Tewana, we accept the charge which you have im-

posed in us," he began quietly. "But understand, we come not to rule you; we come to guide you. It is time that you should learn to rule yourselves.

"The days of rulers have passed. Woe unto them that seek to rule, and woe unto the people that bows its neck to rulers! The message which we have come to deliver unto you, we deliver likewise unto all men and it shall go forth unto the uttermost confines of the earth." He paused, then raising his voice on high once more, he continued:

"Tewana, do you accept the terms? We come to guide you, not to rule you!"

A profound silence followed his speech. No sound was heard save the sighing of the wind among the warriors' lance tips and shields and their arrow-filled quivers, and the rustling of the seven eagle feathers attached to the White Cloud's staff.

"Tewana," he asked again. "Do you accept the terms?"

Again all was silence. Then, all of a sudden, a vibrant, ringing note, audible to all, the scream of the eagle, came floating downward, clear and bell-like, from out the sky.

"'Tis the warning voice of the bird; the wisdom of the Ancient Ones!" cried the White Cloud. "The spirit of the Great Mystery has spoken once more!

"We accept — we accept!" And seizing the staff with his right hand, he raised it and made the sign of the cross above their heads. Then turning and facing the warriors, he raised the staff on high once more and cried in a loud voice:

"Tewana, earth-born Children of the Sun, salute your Chieftains!" A mighty shout went up from the entire multitude. Ten thousand bow-strings twanged on the air, and ten thousand arrows flew upward toward the sun.

Again and again the shouts of acclamation broke from the assembled multitude and swept over them in great waves of sound until valley and hills and mountains resounded with the cry, and then the people again took up the ancient chant of the kings whose refrain, filling the valley, swelled ever outward and upward to the great sacred bird that soared high aloft with widespread pinions in the pale azure of heaven.

"It is done — it is done!" echoed and reëchoed the refrain. Few there are to whom the vision has been given, and fewer still that heed it.

THE END